

Bhagavad Gita

(With English Text and Commentary)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED:

01.	AiU AitareyoPanishad 2 verses
02.	AVG Ashtavakra Gita 1
03.	AV Atharvaveda 7
04.	BP Bhagavata MahaPurana 39
05.	BrU BrihadaranyakoPanishad 11
06.	BS BrahmaSutra 9
07.	ChU ChandogyoPanishad 7
08.	DB Devi Bhagavatam 4
09.	IsU IshavasyoPanishad 2
10.	KaU KathoPanishad 15
11.	KeU KenoPanishad 2
12.	MaU MandukyoPanishad 1
13.	MB Mahabharata 57
14.	MS Manu Smriti 10
15.	MuU MundakoPanishad 11
16.	NBS Narada BhaktiSutra 1
17.	PrU PrashhnoPanishad 1
18.	PYS Patanjali YogaSutra 8
19.	RV Rigveda 21
20.	SBS Shandilya BhaktiSutra 3
21.	ShU ShvetashvataroPanishad 4
22.	SV Samaveda 1
23.	TaU TaittiriyoPanishad 2
24.	TR Tulasi Ramayan 29
25.	VC Vivekachudamani 5
26.	VP Vishnu Purana 6
27.	VR Valmiki Ramayanam 6
28.	YV Yajurveda, Vajasaneyi Samhita 4
	YVa YogaVashishtha 3/ 275

INTRODUCTION

The Gita is a doctrine of universal truth. Its message is universal, sublime, and non-sectarian although it is a part of the scriptural trinity of Sanaatana Dharma, commonly known as Hinduism. The Gita is very easy to understand in any language for a mature mind. A repeated reading with faith will reveal all the sublime ideas contained in it. A few abstruse statements are interspersed here and there, but they have no direct bearing on practical issues or the central theme of Gita. The Gita deals with the most sacred metaphysical science. It imparts the knowledge of the Self and answers two universal questions: Who am I, and how can I lead a happy and peaceful life in this world of dualities? It is a book of yoga, the moral and spiritual growth for mankind, based on the cardinal principles of the Hindu religion.

The message of the Gita came to humanity because of Arjuna's unwillingness to do his duty as a warrior because fighting involved destruction and killing. Nonviolence or Ahimsa is one of the most fundamental tenets of Hinduism. All lives, human or non-human, are sacred. This immortal discourse between the Supreme Lord, Krishna, and His devotee-friend, Arjuna, occurs not in a temple, a secluded forest, or on a mountain top but on a battlefield on the eve of a war and is recorded in the great epic, Mahaabhaarata. In the Gita Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to get up and fight. This may create a misunderstanding of the principles of Ahimsa if the background of the war of Mahaabhaarata is not kept in mind. Therefore, a brief historical description is in order.

In ancient times there was a king who had two sons, Dhritaraashtra and Paandu. The former was born blind; therefore, Paandu inherited the kingdom. Paandu had five sons. They were called the Paandavs. Dhritaraashtra had one hundred sons. They were called the Kauravs. Duryodhana was the eldest of the Kauravs.

After the death of king Paandu, the eldest son of Paandu became the lawful King. Duryodhana was a very jealous person. He also wanted the kingdom. The kingdom was divided into two halves between the Paandavs and the Kauravs. Duryodhana was not satisfied with his share of the kingdom. He wanted the entire kingdom for himself. He unsuccessfully planned several foul plots to kill the Paandavs and take away their kingdom. He unlawfully took possession of the entire kingdom of the Paandavs and refused to give back even an acre of land without a war. All mediation by Lord Krishna and others failed. The big war of Mahaabhaarata was thus inevitable. The Paandavs were unwilling participants. They had only two choices: Fight for their right

as a matter of duty or run away from war and accept defeat in the name of peace and nonviolence. Arjuna, one of the five Paandava brothers, faced the dilemma in the battlefield whether to fight or run away from war for the sake of peace.

Arjuna's dilemma is, in reality, the universal dilemma. All human beings face dilemmas, big and small, in their everyday life when performing their duties. Arjuna's dilemma was a big one. He had to make a choice between fighting the war and killing his most revered guru who was on the other side, very dear friends, close relatives, and many innocent warriors; or running away from the battlefield for the sake of preserving the peace and nonviolence. The entire seven hundred verses of the Gita are a discourse between Lord Krishna and the confused Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra near New Delhi, India, about 3,100 years BCE. This discourse was narrated to the blind king, Dhritaraashtra, by his charioteer, Sanjaya, as an eyewitness war report.

The main objective of the Gita is to help people — struggling in the darkness of ignorance — cross the ocean of transmigration and reach the spiritual shore of liberation while living and working in society. The central teaching of the Gita is the attainment of freedom or happiness from the bondage of life by doing one's duty. Always remember the glory and greatness of the Creator and do your duty efficiently without being attached to or affected by the results, even if that duty may at times demand unavoidable violence. Some people neglect or give up their duty in life for the sake of a spiritual life while others excuse themselves from spiritual practices because they believe that they have no time. The Lord's message is to sanctify the entire living process itself. Whatever a person does or thinks, ought to be done for the glory and satisfaction of the Maker. No effort or cost is necessary for this process. Do your duty as a service to the Lord and humanity, and see God alone in everything in a spiritual frame of mind. In order to gain such a spiritual frame of mind, personal discipline, austerity, penance, good conduct, selfless service, yogic practices, meditation, worship, prayer, rituals, and study of scriptures, as well as the company of holy persons, pilgrimage, chanting of the holy names of God, and Self-inquiry are needed to purify the body, mind, and intellect. One must learn to give up lust, anger, greed, and establish mastery over the mind and five senses (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell) by the purified intellect. One should always remember that all works are done by the energy of nature and that one is not the doer but only an instrument. One must strive for excellence in all undertakings but maintain equanimity in success and failure, gain and loss, and pain and pleasure.

The ignorance of metaphysical knowledge is humanity's greatest predicament. A scripture, being the voice of transcendence, cannot be translated. Language is incapable and translations are defective to clearly impart the knowledge of the Absolute. In this rendering, an attempt has been made to keep the style as close as possible to the original Sanskrit poetry and yet make it easy to read and understand. An attempt has been made to improve the clarity by adding words or phrases, within parentheses, in the English translation of the verses. One hundred and thirty-three (133) key verses are printed in **red** for the convenience of beginners. We suggest all our readers to ponder, contemplate, and act upon these verses. The beginners and the busy executives should first read and understand the meaning of these key verses before delving deep into the bottomless ocean of transcendental knowledge of the Gita.

According to the scriptures, no sin, however heinous, can affect one who reads, ponders, and practices the teachings of Gita any more than water affects the lotus leaf. The Lord Himself resides where Gita is kept, read, chanted, or taught. One who reads, ponders, and practices the teachings of Gita with faith and devotion will attain Moksha (or Nirvana) by the grace of God.

This book is dedicated to all the gurus whose blessings, grace, and teachings have been invaluable. It is offered to the greatest Guru, Lord Krishna, with love and devotion. May the Lord accept it, and bless those who repeatedly read this with peace, happiness, and the true knowledge of the Self.

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1. ARJUNA'S DILEMMA

The war of Mahaabhaarata had begun after all negotiations by Lord Krishna and others to avoid it failed. Sage Vyasa, the author of Mahaabhaarata, wanted to give the blind King (Dhritaraashtra) the boon of eyesight so that the King could see the horrors of the war for which he was responsible. But the King refused the offer. He did not want to see the horrors of the war; but preferred to get the war report through his charioteer, Sanjaya. Sage Vyasa granted the power of clairvoyance and clairvision to Sanjaya. With this power Sanjaya could see, hear, and recall the events of the past, present, and future. He was able to give an instant replay of the eye-witness war report to the blind King sitting in the palace.

Bhishma, the mightiest man and the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava's army, is disabled by Arjuna and dying on the battleground on the tenth day of the

eighteen-day war. Upon hearing this bad news from Sanjaya, the blind King loses all hope for victory by his sons. Now the King wants to know the details of the war from the beginning, including how the mightiest man, the commander-in-chief of his superior army — who had a boon of dying at his own will — was defeated in the battlefield. The teaching of the Gita begins with the inquiry of the blind King, after Sanjaya described how Bhishma was defeated, as follows:

The King inquired: Sanjaya, please, now tell me in detail, what did my people (the Kauravas) and the Pandavas do in the battlefield before the war started? (1.01)

Sanjaya said: O King, After seeing the battle formation of the Pandava's army, your son approached his guru and spoke these words: (1.02)

NOTE: Beginners should not become lost in the jungle of historic proper nouns, or the names of the characters of Mahābhārata in this chapter and the Sanskrit names of various celestial controlling forces (Devas) in Chapter 10 of the Bhagavad-Gita. These names have no bearing on the main theme of the Gita; therefore, these names are either omitted or substituted by generic names in this rendition.

O Master, behold this mighty army of the Pandavas, arranged in battle formation by your other talented disciple! There are many great warriors, valiant men, heroes, and mighty archers. (1.03-06)

INTRODUCTION OF THE ARMY COMMANDERS

Also there are many heroes on my side who have risked their lives for me. I shall name a few distinguished commanders of my army for your information. He named all the officers of his army and said: They are armed with various weapons and are skilled in warfare. (1.07-09)

The army protecting our commander-in-chief is insufficient, whereas my archrival on the other side is well protected. Therefore all of you, occupying your respective positions, protect our commander-in-chief. (1.10-11)

WAR STARTS WITH THE BLOWING OF CONCH SHELLS

The mighty commander-in-chief and the eldest man of the dynasty, roared as a lion and blew his conch loudly, bringing joy to your son. (1.12)

Soon after that, conches, kettledrums, cymbals, drums, and trumpets were sounded together. The commotion was tremendous. (1.13)

After that, Lord Krishna and Arjuna, seated in a grand chariot yoked with white horses, blew their celestial conches. (1.14)

Krishna blew His conch; then Arjuna and all other commanders of various divisions of the army of Pandavas blew their respective conches. The tumultuous uproar, resounding through the earth and sky, tore the hearts of your sons. (1.15-19)

ARJUNA WANTS TO INSPECT THE ARMY AGAINST WHOM HE IS ABOUT TO FIGHT

Seeing your sons standing and the war about to begin with the hurling of weapons, Arjuna took up his bow and spoke these words to Lord Krishna: O Lord, please stop my chariot between the two armies until I behold those who stand here eager for the battle and with whom I must engage in this act of war. (1.20-22)

I wish to see those who are willing to serve and appease the evil-minded Kauravas by assembling here to fight the battle. (1.23)

Sanjaya said: O King, Lord Krishna, as requested by Arjuna, placed the best of all the chariots in the midst of the two armies facing Arjuna's grandfather, his guru and all other Kings, and said to Arjuna: Behold these assembled soldiers! (1.24-25)

Arjuna saw his uncles, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and other comrades in the army. (1.26)

ARJUNA'S DILEMMA

After seeing fathers-in-law, companions, and all his kinsmen standing in the ranks of the two armies, Arjuna was overcome with great compassion and sorrowfully spoke these words: O Krishna, seeing my kinsmen standing with a desire to fight, my limbs fail and my mouth becomes dry. My body quivers and my hairs stand on end. (1.27-29)

The bow slips from my hand and my skin intensely burns. My head turns, I am unable to stand steady, and O Krishna, I see bad omens. I

see no use of killing my kinsmen in battle. (1.30-31)

I desire neither victory nor pleasure nor kingdom, O Krishna. What is the use of the kingdom or enjoyment or even life, O Krishna; because all those — for whom we desire kingdom, enjoyments, and pleasures — are standing here for the battle, giving up their lives? (1.32-33)

I do not wish to kill my teachers, uncles, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law, and other relatives who are about to kill us, even for the sovereignty of the three worlds, let alone for this earthly kingdom, O Krishna. (1.34-35)

O Lord Krishna, what pleasure shall we find in killing our cousin brothers? Upon killing these felons, we shall incur only sin. (1.36)

Therefore, we should not kill our cousin brothers. How can we be happy after killing our relatives, O Krishna? (1.37)

Though they are blinded by greed and do not see evil in the destruction of the family or sin in being treacherous to friends, why should not we, who clearly see evil in the destruction of the family, think about turning away from this sin, O Krishna? (1.38-39)

ARJUNA DESCRIBES THE EVILS OF WAR

Eternal family traditions and codes of moral conduct are destroyed with the destruction of (the head of the) family in a war. And immorality prevails in the family due to the destruction of family traditions. (1.40)

And when immorality prevails, O Krishna, people become corrupted. And when people are corrupted, unwanted progeny are born. (1.41)

This brings the family and the slayers of the family to hell because the spirits of their ancestors are degraded when deprived of ceremonial offerings of love and respect by the unwanted progeny. (1.42)

The everlasting qualities of social order and family traditions of those who destroy their family are ruined by the sinful act of illegitimacy. (1.43)

We have been told, O Krishna, that people whose family traditions are destroyed necessarily dwell in hell for a long time. (1.44)

Alas! We are ready to commit a great sin by striving to slay our relatives because of greed for the pleasures of the kingdom. (1.45)

It would be far better for me if my cousin brothers kill me with their weapons in battle while I am unarmed and unresisting. (1.46)

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, EVEN TOUGH ONES CAN GET DELUDED

Sanjaya said: Having said this in the battlefield and casting aside his bow and arrow, Arjuna sat down on the seat of the chariot with his mind overwhelmed with sorrow. (1.47)

2. TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Sanjaya said: Lord Krishna spoke these words to Arjuna whose eyes were tearful and downcast and who was overwhelmed with compassion and despair. (2.01)

Lord Krishna said: How has the dejection come to you at this juncture? This is not fit for a person of noble mind and deeds. It is disgraceful, and it does not lead one to heaven, O Arjuna. (2.02)

Do not become a coward, O Arjuna, because it does not befit you. Shake off this trivial weakness of your heart and get up for the battle, O Arjuna. (2.03)

ARJUNA CONTINUES HIS REASONING AGAINST THE WAR

Arjuna said: How shall I strike my grandfather, my guru, and all other relatives — who are worthy of my respect — with arrows in battle, O Krishna? (2.04)

Arjuna had a valid point. In Vedic culture, gurus, the elderly, honorable personalities, and all other superiors are to be respected. One should not fight or even joke or speak sarcastically with superiors, even if they hurt you. But the scriptures also say that anyone who is engaged in abominable activities or supports misdeeds against you or others, is no longer to be respected, but punished.

It would be better, indeed, to live on alms in this world than to slay these noble personalities because by killing them I would enjoy wealth and pleasures stained with their blood. (2.05)

We do not know which alternative — to fight or to quit — is better for us. Further, we do not know whether we will conquer them or they will conquer us. We should not even wish to live after killing our cousin brothers who are standing in front of us. (2.06)

Arjuna was unable to decide what to do. It is said that expert guidance of a guru, the spiritual counselor, should be sought during a moment of crisis or to overcome the perplexities of life. Arjuna now requests Krishna for guidance.

My senses are overcome by the weakness of pity, and my mind is confused about duty (Dharma). Please tell me what is better for me. I am Your disciple, and I take refuge in You. (2.07)

NOTE: 'Dharma' may be defined as the eternal law governing, upholding, and supporting creation and the world order. It is the eternal relationship between the creator and His creatures. It also means way of life, doctrine, principle, prescribed duty, righteousness, right action, integrity, ideal conduct, custom, virtue, nature, essential quality, commandments, moral principles, spiritual truth, spirituality, spiritual values, and a function within the scriptural injunction or religion.

I do not perceive that gaining an unrivaled and prosperous kingdom on this earth, or even lordship over all the celestial controllers, will remove the sorrow that is drying up my senses. (2.08)

Sanjaya said: O King, after speaking like this to Lord Krishna, the mighty Arjuna said to Krishna: I shall not fight, and became silent. (2.09)

O King, Lord Krishna, as if smiling, spoke these words to the distressed Arjuna in the midst of the two armies. (2.10)

THE TEACHINGS OF THE GITA BEGIN WITH THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF AND THE PHYSICAL BODY

Lord Krishna said: You grieve for those who are not worthy of grief and yet speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. (2.11)

People meet and depart in this world as two pieces of wood flowing down the river come together and then separate from each other (MB 12.174.15). The wise, who know that the body is mortal and the Spirit is immortal, have nothing to moan about (KaU 2.22).

NOTE: The Self (or Atma) is also called soul or consciousness and is the source of life and the cosmic power behind the body-mind complex. Just as our body exists in space, similarly, our thoughts, intellect, emotions, and psyche exist in the Self, the space of consciousness. Self cannot be perceived by our physical senses because Self is beyond the domain of the senses. The senses were designed only to comprehend physical objects.

The word ‘Atma’ has been also used in the ‘Gita’ for the lower self (body, mind, and senses), psyche, intellect, soul, spirit, subtle senses, oneself, ego, heart, human beings, Eternal Being (Brahma), Absolute Truth, individual soul, and the supersoul or the supreme Self, depending on the context.

There was never a time when these monarchs, you, or I did not exist, nor shall we ever cease to exist in the future. (2.12)

Just as the soul acquires a childhood body, a youth body, and an old-age body during this life, similarly, the soul acquires another body after death. This should not delude the wise. (See also 15.08) (2.13)

The contacts of the senses with sense objects give rise to the feelings of heat and cold, and pain and pleasure. They are transitory and impermanent. Therefore, one should learn to endure them bravely. (2.14)

Because a calm person — who is not afflicted by these sense objects and is steady in pain and pleasure — becomes fit for salvation. (2.15)

Nothing can hurt one if the mind can be trained to withstand the impulse of the pairs of opposites — joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures, loss and gain. The phenomenal world cannot exist without the pairs of opposites. Good and evil, pain and pleasure will always exist. The universe is a playground designed by God for the living entities. It takes two to play a game. The game cannot continue if the pairs of opposites are altogether eliminated. Before one can feel joy, one must know sorrow. Both negative and positive experiences are needed for our growth and spiritual development. Cessation of pain brings pleasure, and cessation of pleasure results in pain. Thus, pain is born in the womb of

pleasure. Peace is born in the womb of war. Sorrow exists because the desire for happiness exists. When the desire for happiness disappears, so does the sorrow. Sorrow is only a prelude to happiness and vice versa. Even the joy of going to heaven is followed by the sorrow of coming back to the earth; therefore, worldly objects should not be the main goal of human life. If one chooses material pleasures, it is like giving up nectar and choosing poison instead.

Change is the law of nature— change from summer to winter, from spring to fall, from the light of the full moon to the darkness of the new moon. Neither pain nor pleasure last forever. Pleasure comes after pain, and pain is followed again by pleasure. Reflecting like this, one must learn to tolerate the blows of time with patience and learn not only to endure, but also to expect, welcome, and enjoy both the joys as well as the sorrows of life. Sow the seed of hope in the soil of sorrow. Find your way in the darkness of the night of adversity with the torch of the scriptures and faith in God. There would be no opportunities if there were no problems. Destiny is born out of crisis. Einstein said: Opportunity lies in the middle of difficulties.

THE SELF IS ETERNAL, BODY IS TRANSITORY

The invisible Self (Atma, Atman, the soul, spirit, the life-force) is eternal. The visible physical body is transitory, and it undergoes changes. The reality of these two is indeed certainly seen by the seer of the truth (who knows that we are not this body, but the Atma). (2.16)

The Self exists everywhere and at all times — past, present, and future. The human body and the universe both have a temporary existence, but appear permanent at first sight. Webster defines Atman or Atma as the 'World Soul', from which all souls derive and the Supreme Abode to which they return. Atma is also called 'Jivatma' or 'Jiva', which is the ultimate source of all individual selves. We have used the English words: Self, Spirit, spirit, soul, or individual soul interchangeably for different aspects of Atma.

Our physical body is subject to birth, growth, maturity, reproduction, decay, and death; whereas the Self is eternal, indestructible, pure, unique, all knower, substratum, unchangeable, self-luminous, the cause of all causes, all pervading, unaffected, immutable, and inexplicable.

The Spirit, by whom this entire universe is pervaded, is indestructible. No one can destroy the imperishable Spirit. (2.17)

The physical bodies of the eternal, immutable, and incomprehensible Spirit are mortal. Spirit (Atma) is immortal. Therefore, as a warrior, you must fight, O Arjuna. (2.18)

One who thinks that the Spirit is a slayer, and one who thinks the Spirit is slain are both ignorant because the Spirit neither slays nor is slain. (2.19)

The Spirit is neither born, nor does it die at any time. It does not come into being nor cease to exist. It is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. The Spirit is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. (2.20)

O Arjuna, how can a person who knows that the Spirit is indestructible, eternal, unborn, and immutable, kill anyone or causes anyone to be killed? (2.21)

DEATH AND TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL

Just as a person puts on new garments after discarding the old ones, similarly, the living entity or the individual soul acquires new bodies after casting away the old bodies. (2.22)

Just as a caterpillar takes hold of another object before leaving an object, similarly, the living entity (or soul) obtains a new body before or after leaving the old one (BrU 4.4.03). The physical body has also been compared to a cage, a vehicle, an abode, as well as a garment of the subtle body that needs to be changed frequently. Death is the separation of the subtle body from the physical body. The living entity is a traveler. Death is not the end of the journey of the living entity. Death is like a rest area where the individual soul changes vehicles and the journey continues. Life is continuous and endless. Inevitable death is not the end of life; it is only an end of a perishable, physical body.

Weapons do not cut this Spirit, fire does not burn it, water does not make it wet, and the wind does not make it dry. The Spirit cannot be cut, burned, wet, or dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, changeless, immovable, and primeval. Atma is beyond space and time. (2.23-24)

The Spirit is said to be unexplainable, incomprehensible, and immutable. Knowing the Spirit as such, you should not grieve for the physical body. (2.25)

In the previous verses Krishna asked us not to worry about the indestructible spirit. A question may arise: Should one lament the death of (the destructible

body of) our near and dear ones at all? The answer comes:

Even if you think that the physical body takes birth and dies perpetually, even then, O Arjuna, you should not grieve like this because death is certain for one who is born, and birth is certain for one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable death. (2.26-27)

One should not lament the death of anybody at all. Lamentation is due to attachment, and attachment binds the individual soul to the wheel of transmigration. Therefore, the scriptures suggest one should not mourn, but pray for several days after the person's death for salvation of the departed soul.

The inevitability of death and indestructibility of the soul, however, does not and cannot justify lawful but unnecessary killing of any creature, unjust war, or even suicide. The Vedic scriptures are very clear on this point in regard to killing human beings or any other living entity. The scripture says: One should not commit violence towards anyone. Unauthorized killing is punishable in all circumstances: A life for life. Lord Krishna is urging Arjuna to fight — but not to kill wantonly — in order to establish peace and law and order on earth as a matter of a warrior's duty.

All beings are unmanifest (or invisible) to our physical eyes before birth and after death. They manifest between birth and death only. What is there to grieve about? (2.28)

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE SPIRIT TRANSCENDS MIND AND SPEECH

Some look upon this Spirit as a wonder, another describes it as wonderful, and others hear of it as a wonder. Even after hearing about it, very few people know what the Spirit is. (See also KaU 2.07) (2.29)

O Arjuna, the Spirit that dwells in the body of all beings is eternally indestructible. Therefore, you should not mourn for anybody. (2.30)

LORD KRISHNA REMINDS ARJUNA OF THE DUTY OF A WARRIOR

Considering also your duty as a warrior, you should not waver because there is nothing more auspicious than one's personal duty in life. (2.31)

Only the fortunate warriors, O Arjuna, get such an opportunity for a righteous war against evil that is like an open door to heaven. (2.32)

The righteous war is not a religious war against the followers of other religions. The righteous war may be waged even against our own evil-doer kith and kin (RV 6.75.19). Life is a continuous battle between the forces of evil and goodness. A valiant person must fight with the spirit of a warrior — with a will and determination for victory — and without any compromise with the forces of evil and difficulties. God helps the valiant who adhere to morality. Dharma (righteousness) protects those who protect Dharma (morality, justice, and righteousness).

It is better to die for a right cause and acquire the grace of sacrifice than to die an ordinary but compulsory death. The gates of heaven open wide for those who stand up to vindicate justice and righteousness (Dharma). Not to oppose an evil is to indirectly support it. Very similar ideas are expressed in other scriptures of the world. The Koran says: Allah loves those who battle for His cause in ranks (Surah 61.04). The Bible says: Happy are those who suffer persecution because they do what God requires. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them (Matthew 5.10). There is no sin in killing an aggressor. Whosoever helps and supports an aggressor is also an aggressor. Thus, all those who supported Kauravas were basically aggressors and deserved to be eliminated.

If you will not fight this battle of good over evil, you will fail in your duty, lose your reputation as a warrior, and incur sin by not doing the right action. (2.33)

People will talk about your disgrace for a long time. To the honorable, dishonor is worse than death. (2.34)

The great warriors will think that you have retreated from the battle out of fear. Those who have greatly esteemed you will lose respect for you. (2.35)

Your enemies will speak many unmentionable words and scorn your ability. What could be more painful to you than this? (2.36)

You will go to heaven if killed in the line of duty, or you will enjoy the kingdom on the earth if victorious. No matter what happens, you win. Therefore, get up with a determination to fight, O Arjuna. (2.37)

Treating pleasure and pain, gain and loss, and victory and defeat alike, engage yourself in your duty. By doing your duty this way, you will not incur any sin. (2.38)

Lord Krishna says here that even the violence done in the line of duty with a proper frame of mind, as discussed in the above verse, is sinless. This is the starting verse of the theory of KarmaYoga, the main theme of the Gita.

The wise should wholeheartedly welcome pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, without becoming discouraged (MB 12.174.39). Two types of people are happy in this world: those who are completely ignorant and those who are truly wise. All others are unhappy (MB 12.174.33).

THE SCIENCE OF KARMA-YOGA, THE SELFLESS ACTION

The science of transcendental knowledge has been imparted to you, O Arjuna. Now listen to the science of God-dedicated, selfless action (Seva), endowed with which you will free yourself from all Karmic bondage, or sin. (2.39)

No effort ever goes to waste in selfless service, and there is no adverse effect. Even a little practice of this discipline protects one from the cycle of repeated birth and death. (2.40)

The selfless action is also called Seva, KarmaYoga, sacrifice, yoga of work, science of proper action, and yoga of equanimity. A KarmaYogi works with love for the Lord as a matter of duty without a selfish desire for the fruits of work or selfish attachment to the results, and becomes free from all fear. The word Karma also means duty, action, deeds, work, endeavor, or the results of past deeds.

A selfless worker has resolute determination only for God-realization, but the desires of one who works to enjoy the fruits of work are endless, which makes the mind unsteady. (2.41)

THE VEDAS DEAL WITH BOTH MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF LIFE

The misguided ones who delight in the melodious chanting of the Vedas — without understanding the real purpose of the Vedas — think, O Arjuna, there is nothing else in the Vedas except the rituals for the sole purpose of obtaining heavenly enjoyment. (2.42)

They are dominated by material desires and consider the attainment of heaven as the highest goal of life. They engage in specific rites for the sake of material prosperity and enjoyment. Rebirth is the result of their action. (2.43)

Self-realization, the real goal of life, is not possible for those who are attached to pleasure and power and whose judgment is obscured by ritualistic activities for fulfillment of selfish desires. (2.44)

Self-realization is to know one's relationship with the Supreme Lord and His true transcendental nature. The promise of material benefits of Vedic rituals is like the promise of candy to a child by the mother to induce him or her to take the medicine of detachment from the material life; it is necessary in most instances. Rituals must be changed with time and backed up by devotion and good deeds. People may pray and meditate anytime, anywhere, without any ritual. Rituals have played a great role in spiritual life, but they have been greatly abused. Lord Krishna and Lord Buddha both disapproved the misuse of Vedic rituals, not the rituals as such. Rituals create a holy and blissful atmosphere. They are regarded as a heavenly ship (RV 10.63.10) and criticized as a frail raft (MuU 1.2.07).

A portion of the Vedas deals with three modes — goodness, passion, and ignorance — of material Nature. Rise above these three modes, and be Self-conscious. Become free from the tyranny of pairs of opposites. Remain tranquil and unconcerned with the thoughts of acquisition and preservation of material objects. (2.45)

To the enlightened person, who has realized the true nature of the Self within, the Vedas become as useful as a small reservoir of water when the water of a huge lake becomes available. (2.46)

A scripture is like a finite pond that derives its water from the infinite ocean of Truth. Therefore, scriptures become unnecessary only after enlightenment in much the same way that a reservoir of water has no use when one is surrounded by floodwater. One who has realized the Supreme Being will not desire the attainment of heaven mentioned as the fruits of performing Vedic rituals. Scriptures, such as the Vedas, are necessary means, but not the end. Scriptures are meant to lead and guide us on the spiritual path. Once the goal is reached, they have served their purpose.

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF KARMA-YOGA

You have control over doing your respective duty only, but no control or claim over the results. The

fruits of work should not be your only motive, and you should never be inactive. (2.47)

This key verse of the Gita has confused some commentators and common people who interpret it to mean that one should work without expecting a fruit. This would mean that Lord Krishna should not expect Arjuna to understand and follow His teachings! No one can perform action without expecting some result. This verse means that one should not expect only favorable results of your choice and should accept all results as Prasada (Grace) from God. This is called Prasada Buddhi, BuddhiYoga or KarmaYoga.

The right outlook on life develops when we fully understand that we have the ability to put our best effort into all endeavors, but we cannot pick the results of our work. We have absolutely no control over all the factors that determine the results. The affairs of the world would not run if all were given the power to choose the results of their actions or to satisfy all their desires. One is given the power and the ability to do one's respective duty in life, but one is not free to choose the desired results. To work without expecting success or good results would be meaningless, but to be fully prepared for the unexpected should be an important part of any planning. Swami Karmananda says: The essence of KarmaYoga is to go to work just to please the creator; mentally renounce the fruits of all action; and let God take care of the results. Do your duty in life — to the best of your ability — as God's personal servant without any regard for the personal enjoyment of the fruits of your work.

Fear of failure, caused by being emotionally attached to the fruits of work, is the greatest impediment to success because it robs efficiency by constantly disturbing equanimity of mind. Therefore, duty should be performed with detached attachment. Success in any undertaking becomes easier if one works hard without being bothered by the outcome. Work is done more efficiently when the mind is not bothered continuously — consciously or subconsciously — with the outcome, good or bad, of an action.

One has to discover this fact personally in life. A person should work without selfish motives as a matter of duty for a greater cause of helping humanity rather than just helping oneself, one's children, or a few individuals. Equanimity and spiritual progress result from selfless service, whereas work with selfish motives create the bonds of Karma as well as great disappointments. Dedicated selfless service for a greater cause leads to everlasting peace and happiness here and hereafter.

The boundary of one's jurisdiction ends with the completion of duty; it never crosses the garden of fruit. A hunter has control over the arrow only, never over the

deer. Harry Bhalla says: A farmer has control over how he works his land, yet no control over the harvest. But he cannot expect a harvest if he does not work his land.

When one has no desire for the pleasure of victory, one is not affected by the pain of defeat. Questions of the pleasure of success or the pain of failure do not arise because a KarmaYogi is always on the path of service without waiting to enjoy the fruit or even the flower of work. He or she has learned to enjoy the joy of service. The myopia of short-term, personal gain, caused by ignorance of metaphysics, is the root of all evils in society and the world. The bird of righteousness cannot be confined in the cage of personal gain. Dharma and selfishness cannot stay together.

The desire for fruit takes one to the dark alley of sin and prevents one's real growth. Acting only in one's own self-interest is sinful. The welfare of the individual lies in the welfare of society. The wise work for all of society, whereas the ignorant work only for themselves or their children and grandchildren. One who knows the Truth does not let the shadow of personal gain fall on the path of duty. The secret art of living a meaningful life is to be intensely active without any selfish motive, as stated below:

Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, with your mind attached to the Lord, abandoning worry and selfish attachment to the results, and remaining calm in both success and failure. Selfless service brings peace and equanimity of mind that lead to the union with God. (2.48)

KarmaYoga is defined as doing one's duty while maintaining equanimity under all circumstances. Pain and pleasure, birth and death, loss and gain, union and separation are inevitable, being under the control of one's past deeds or Karma, like the coming of day and night. Fools rejoice in prosperity and mourn in adversity, but a KarmaYogi remains tranquil under all circumstances (TR 2.149.03-04). The word 'yoga' has also been defined in the following verses of the Gita: 2.50, 2.53, 6.04, 6.08, 6.19, 6.23, 6.29, 6.31, 6.32, and 6.47. Any practical technique of understanding the Supreme Reality and uniting with Him is called spiritual practice, or yoga.

Work done with selfish motives is inferior by far to selfless service. Therefore, be a selfless worker, O Arjuna. Those who work only to enjoy the fruits of their labor are unhappy (because one has no control over the results). (See also 2.48, 6.03, 10.10, and 18.57) (2.49)

A KarmaYogi or the selfless person becomes free from both vice and virtue in this life itself. Therefore, strive for selfless service. Working to the best of one's abilities without becoming selfishly attached to the fruits of work is called KarmaYoga or Seva. (2.50)

Peace, composure, and freedom from Karmic bondage await those who work for a noble cause with a spirit of detachment and do not seek any personal reward or recognition. Such persons enjoy the joy of selfless service that ultimately leads them to the bliss of salvation. KarmaYoga purifies the mind and is a very powerful and easy spiritual discipline that one can practice while living and working in society. There is no religion better than selfless service. The fruits of vice and virtue grow only on the tree of selfishness, not on the tree of selfless service.

Generally, it is thought that one works harder when one is deeply interested in, or attached to, the fruits of work. Therefore, KarmaYoga or selfless service may not be very conducive to the material progress of the individual or society. This dilemma can be solved by developing a hobby of selfless service to a noble cause of one's choice, never letting greed for the fruits dilute the purity of action. Dexterity or skillfulness in work lies in not getting bound by the bonds of one's Karma or worldly duty.

KarmaYogis are freed from the bondage of rebirth due to renouncing the selfish attachment to the fruits of all work and they attain a blissful divine state of salvation or Nirvana. (2.51)

When your intellect completely pierces the veil of confusion regarding Self and non-Self, then you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is to be heard from the scriptures. (2.52)

Scriptures become dispensable after enlightenment. According to Shankara, this verse means one who has rent asunder the veil of ignorance and realized the Truth, becomes indifferent to the Vedic texts that prescribe details of performing rituals for the attainment of desired fruits.

When your intellect that is confused by the conflicting opinions and the ritualistic doctrine of the Vedas shall stay steady and firm, concentrating on the Supreme Being, then you will be enlightened and completely united with God in trance. (2.53)

Non-scriptural reading or reading of different philosophical writings is bound to create confusion. Ramakrishna said: "One should learn from the scriptures

that God alone is real and the world is illusory.” A beginner should know that only God is eternal and everything else is temporal. After Self-awareness, one finds God alone has become everything. Everything is His manifestation. He is sporting in various forms. In trance, or the superconscious state of mind, the confusion arising from conflicting views ceases, and mental equipoise is attained.

Different schools of thought, cults, systems of philosophy, ways of worship, and spiritual practices found in the Vedic culture are different rungs in the ladder of yoga. Such a wide choice of methods does not exist in any other system, religion, or way of life. People’s temperaments are different due to differences in their stages of spiritual development and understanding. Therefore, different schools of thought are necessary to suit different individuals, as well as the same individual as he or she grows and develops. The highest philosophy of pure monism is the topmost rung of the ladder. The vast majority cannot comprehend it. All schools and cults are necessary. One should not be confused because different methods are not meant to confuse, but one should choose wisely.

Arjuna said: O Krishna, what are the marks of an enlightened person whose intellect is steady? What does a person of steady intellect think and talk about? How does such a person behave with others, and live in this world? (2.54)

The answers to all of the above questions are given by Lord Krishna in the remaining verses of this chapter.

MARKS OF A SELF-REALIZED PERSON

Lord Krishna said: When one is completely free from all desires of the mind and is satisfied with the bliss of knowing the Supreme Being, then one is called an enlightened person, O Arjuna. (2.55)

According to mother Sarada, desires for knowledge, devotion, and salvation cannot be classed as desires because they are higher desires. One should first replace the lower desires with higher desires and then renounce the highest desires also and become absolutely free. It is said that the highest freedom is the freedom from becoming free.

A person is called an enlightened sage of steady intellect whose mind is unperturbed by adversity, who does not crave pleasures, and who is completely free from attachment, fear, and anger. (2.56)

Attachment to people, places, and objects takes away the intellect, and one becomes myopic. People are helplessly tied with the rope of attachment. One has to learn to cut this rope with the sword of knowledge of the Absolute and become detached and free.

The mind and intellect become steady in a person who is not attached to anything, who is neither elated by getting desired results nor perturbed by undesired results. (2.57)

True spiritualists have a peaceful and happy look on their faces under all circumstances.

When one can completely withdraw the senses from sense objects, as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into the shell for protection from calamity, then the intellect of such a person is considered steady. (2.58)

When a person learns to control or withdraw the senses from sense objects, as a tortoise retracts its limbs inside its shell in time of danger and cannot be forced to extend its limbs again until the trouble is over, the lamp of Self-knowledge becomes lighted, and one perceives the self-effulgent Supreme Being within (MB 12.174.51). A Self-realized person enjoys the beauty of the world, keeping the senses under complete control like a tortoise. The best way to purify the senses and control them perfectly like a tortoise, is to engage them in the service of God at all times.

The desire for sensual pleasures fades away if one abstains from sense enjoyment, but the craving for sense enjoyment remains in a very subtle form. This subtle craving also completely disappears from one who knows the Supreme Being. (2.59)

The desire for sensual pleasure becomes dormant when one abstains from sense enjoyment, or incurs physical limitations imposed by disease or old age. But the craving remains as a subtle mental impression. Those who have tasted the nectar of unity with the Supreme Being no longer find enjoyment in the lower-level sensual pleasures. The subtle craving lurks like a robber ready to rob the striver at the appropriate opportunity, as explained below:

DANGERS OF UNRESTRAINED SENSES

Restless senses, O Arjuna, forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise person striving for perfection. (2.60)

The wise always keep vigilance over the mind. The mind can never be fully trusted. It can mislead even

a Self-realized person (BP 5.06.02-05). One has to be very alert and closely witness the wanderings of the mind. Never relax your vigilance until the final goal of God-realization is reached. Mother Sarada said: It is the very nature of the mind to go to lower objects of enjoyment, just as it is the nature of water to flow downwards. The grace of God can make the mind go towards higher objects, just as the sun's rays lift the water to the sky.

The human mind is ever ready to deceive and play tricks. Therefore, discipline, constant vigilance, and sincere spiritual practice are needed. The mind is like an unruly horse that needs to be broken in. Never let the mind roam unwatched into the realm of sensuality. The path of spiritual life is very slippery and has to be trodden very carefully to avoid falls. It is not a joyous ferryboat ride, but a very difficult path to tread like the sharp edge of a sword. Many obstacles, distractions, and failures come on the path to help the devotee become stronger and more advanced on the path, just like iron is turned into steel by alternate heating, cooling, and hammering. One should not get discouraged by failures, but carry on with determination.

One should fix one's mind on Me with loving contemplation after bringing the senses under control. One's intellect becomes steady when one's senses are under complete control. (2.61)

One develops attachment to sense objects by thinking about sense objects. Desire for sense objects comes from attachment to sense objects, and anger comes from unfulfilled desires. (2.62)

Delusion or wild ideas arise from anger. The mind is bewildered by delusion. Reasoning is destroyed when the mind is bewildered. One falls from the right path when reasoning is destroyed. (2.63)

ATTAINMENT OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS THROUGH SENSE CONTROL AND KNOWLEDGE

A disciplined person, enjoying sense objects with senses that are under control and free from attachments and aversions, attains tranquility. (2.64)

Real peace and happiness are achieved, not by sense gratification, but by sense control.

All sorrows are destroyed upon attainment of tranquility. The intellect of such a tranquil person soon becomes completely steady and united with the Supreme. (2.65)

There is neither Self-knowledge nor Self-perception for those who are not united with the Supreme. Without Self-perception there is no peace, and without peace there can be no happiness. (2.66)

The mind, when controlled by the roving senses, steals away the intellect as a storm takes away a boat on the sea from its destination — the spiritual shore of peace and happiness. (2.67)

A person without control over the mind and senses drifts like a ship without its rudder, becomes a reactor instead of an actor, and develops negative Karma.

Greed for the pleasure of enjoying the light leads bugs to destruction; similarly, desire for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures keeps one away from Self-knowledge and leads into the net of transmigration (MB 3.02.69).

Therefore, O Arjuna, one's intellect becomes steady when the senses are completely withdrawn from sense objects. (2.68)

A yogi, the person of self-restraint, remains wakeful when it is night for all others. It is night for the yogi who sees when all others are wakeful. (2.69)

Ascetics keep awake or detached in the night of mundane existence of life because they are in quest of the highest truth. One is considered awake when one is free from worldly desires (TR 2.92.02). A yogi is always aware of the Spirit about which others are unaware. A sage who sees is unaware of the experience of sense objects about which others are aware. The life of an ascetic is entirely different from the life of a materialistic person. What is considered real by a yogi is of no value for a worldly person. While most people sleep and make dream plans in the night of the illusory world, a yogi keeps awake because he or she is detached from the world while living in it.

One attains peace when all desires dissipate within the mind without creating any mental disturbance, just as river waters enter the full ocean without creating any disturbance. One who desires material objects is never peaceful. (2.70)

Torrents of the river of desire can carry away the mind of a materialistic person as a river carries away wood and other objects in its path. The tranquil mind of a yogi is like an ocean that takes in the rivers of desire without being disturbed by them because a yogi does not think about personal gain or loss. Human desires are endless. To satisfy a desire is like drinking salt water that

will never quench thirst, but will increase it. It is like trying to extinguish a fire with gasoline.

Trying to fulfill material desires is like adding more wood to the fire. The fire will go out if no more wood is added to it (MB 12.17.05). If one dies without conquering the great enemy — desires — one has to reincarnate to fight this enemy again and again till victory (MB 12.16.24). One cannot see one's face in a pot of water that is disturbed by the wind, similarly, one is unable to realize one's true Self when the mind and senses remain perturbed by the winds of material desires (MB 12.204.03).

One who abandons all desires and becomes free from longing and the feeling of 'I' and 'my', attains peace. (2.71)

O Arjuna, this is the superconscious state of mind. Attaining this state, one is no longer deluded. Gaining this state, even at the end of one's life, a person attains the very goal of human life by becoming one with God. (2.72).

The Supreme Being is the ultimate Reality and truth, knowledge and consciousness, and is limitless and blissful (TaU 2.01.01). The individual soul becomes blissful and filled with joy after knowing God. The giver of bliss is nothing but the bliss itself like the giver of wealth must have wealth. That from which the origin, sustenance, and dissolution of this universe are derived is called the Absolute (BS 1.01.02, TaU 3.01.01). Knowledge is not a natural quality (Dharma) of the Absolute; it is the intrinsic nature of the Absolute (DB 7.32.19). The Absolute is the substratum, or material as well as efficient cause of the universe. It is both the source and the sink of energy in one. It is also called the Unified Field, Supreme Spirit, Divine Person, and Total Consciousness that is responsible for the sense perceptions in all living beings by functioning through mind and intellect.

The word 'Salvation' in Christianity means deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. Sin in Hinduism is nothing but the Karmic bondage responsible for transmigration. Thus, salvation is equivalent to the Sanskrit word 'Mukti' in Hinduism — the final emancipation of the living entity from transmigration. Mukti means the complete destruction of all impressions of desires from the causal body. It is the uniting of the individual soul with the Supersoul. Some say that the all-pervading Supersoul is the causal body who is conducting everything and remains compassionately detached. The Sanskrit word 'Nirvana' in Buddhism is thought to be the cessation of worldly desires and ego. It is a state of being in which worldly desires and personal likes and dislikes have been absolutely extinguished. It is

getting out of body-consciousness and attaining a state of Self-consciousness. It is liberation from attachment to the material body and achieving a state of bliss with God.

3. PATH OF SELFLESS SERVICE

Arjuna asked: If You consider that acquiring transcendental knowledge is better than working, then why do You want me to engage in this horrible war, O Krishna? You seem to confuse my mind by apparently conflicting words. Tell me, decisively, one thing by which I may attain the Supreme. (3.01-02)

Arjuna was in the mode of delusion; he thought that Lord Krishna meant a contemplative life was better than doing one's normal duty in life. Some people are often confused and think that salvation is possible only by leading a life devoted to scriptural study, contemplation, and acquiring Self-knowledge. Lord Krishna clarifies this by mentioning two major paths of spiritual practice — depending on the nature of the individual — in the following verse:

Lord Krishna said: In this world I have stated a twofold path of spiritual discipline in past — the path of Self-knowledge for the contemplative ones and the path of unselfish work (Seva, KarmaYoga) for all others. (3.03)

'Seva' or 'KarmaYoga' means sacrifice, selfless service, unselfish work, meritorious deeds, giving away something to others. Some people often get confused like Arjuna and think that leading a life devoted to scriptural study, contemplation, and acquiring transcendental knowledge may be better for spiritual progress than doing one's worldly duty.

A God-realized person does not consider oneself the doer of any action, but only an instrument in the hands of the divine for His use. It should be further pointed out that both metaphysical knowledge and selfless service are means to attain the Supreme Being. These two paths are not separate, but complementary. In life a combination of these two modes is considered the best. Carry both selfless service and a spiritual discipline of acquiring Self-knowledge with you as stated in the following verses:

One does not attain freedom from the bondage of Karma by merely abstaining from work. No one attains perfection by merely giving up work because no one can remain actionless even for a moment. Everything in the universe is driven to action — helplessly indeed — by the forces of Nature. (3.04-05)

It is not possible for anybody to completely abandon action by thought, word, and deed. Therefore,

one should always be active in serving the Lord by various means of one's choosing, and never be without work because an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Performing action till death with a desireless frame of mind is better than abandoning work and leading the life of an ascetic, even after God-realization because even an ascetic cannot escape the impulse of action.

Anyone who restrains the senses but mentally thinks of sense pleasures, is called a pretender. (3.06)

One's growth comes from working selflessly rather than giving up work and practicing sense-control before one is naturally ready for it. Bringing the mind under control is difficult, and spiritual life becomes a mockery without mastery over the senses. Desires may become dormant and rise again to give trouble, just as a sleeping person wakes up in due course of time.

The four goals of human life — doing one's duty, earning wealth, material and sensual enjoyment, and attaining salvation — were designed in the Vedic tradition for gradual and systematic growth of the individual and the progress of society. Success in spiritual life does not come from prematurely wearing saffron clothes just to maintain an Ashram or livelihood without first conquering the six enemies — lust, anger, greed, pride, attachment, and envy. It is said that such pretenders do a great disservice to God, society, and themselves and become bereft of happiness in this world and the next (BP 11.18.40-41) A pretending monk is considered sinful and a destroyer of the ascetic order of life.

WHY ONE SHOULD SERVE OTHERS

One who restrains the senses — by a trained and purified mind and intellect — and engages the organs of action to selfless service, is considered superior. (3.07)

Perform your obligatory duty because working is indeed better than sitting idle. Even the maintenance of your body would be impossible without work. (3.08)

Human beings are bound by work (Karma) that is not performed as a selfless service (Seva, Yajna). Therefore, becoming free from selfish attachment to the fruits of work, do your duty efficiently as a service to Me for the good of humanity. (3.09)

TO HELP EACH OTHER IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT OF THE CREATOR

In the beginning, the Creator created human beings together with selfless service (Seva, Yajna, sacrifice) and said: By serving each other you shall prosper, and the sacrificial service shall fulfill all your desires. (3.10)

Nourish the celestial controllers with selfless service, and they will nourish you. Thus nourishing one another, you shall attain the Supreme goal. (3.11)

The celestial controllers, being nourished and pleased by selfless service, will give you all desired objects. One who enjoys the gift of celestial controllers without sharing with others is, indeed, a thief. (3.12)

A celestial controller or guardian angel means a supernatural ruler, a celestial person, an angel, an agent of God, the cosmic forces that control, protect, and fulfill desires. Even the gates of heaven shall be closed to those who try to enter alone. According to the ancient scriptures, helping others is the best meritorious deed one can do. The wise seek to serve themselves in the service of others while the ignorant serve themselves at the cost of others. To serve each other is the original or first commandment of the creator that has been restated by Lord Krishna in the Gita. God has given us talents to help us serve, and in serving others we grow spiritually. We take birth to help each other, to understand, care, love, give, and forgive each other. According to Muniji "Giving is Living". Giving makes the world a better place for all humanity.

It is believed that selfishness saps our natural health and immune system also. When we take steps to move ourselves away from self and think about the needs of others and how to serve them, a physical healing process seems to set in motion. This is especially true if we personally help a person we may never meet again in life.

One who makes no sacrifice, but grabs everything without helping others, is like a thief. It is said that celestials are pleased when people help each other. The capacity of the giver increases by the grace of God, fulfilling all desires to give. The spirit of cooperation — not competition or confrontation — between human beings, between nations, and between organizations seems to be hinted here by the Lord. All the necessities of life are produced by dedicated sacrificial services of other people. We are created to depend on each other. The world has been called a cosmic wheel of cooperative action by Swami Chinmayananda. Cooperation, not competition, is more conducive to overall progress of the individual, as well as society. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved without

cooperation and help from others. The world would be a much better place if all inhabitants cooperated and helped each other, rather than fight or compete with each other. It is the selfish motive that prevents cooperation even between spiritual organizations. One who can truly say all organizations, temples, mosques, and churches are our own, is a true leader and a real saint.

The righteous who eat after sharing with others are freed from all sins, but the impious who cook food only for themselves (without first offering to God or sharing with others), in truth, eat sin. (3.13)

Food should be cooked for the Lord and offered first to Him with love before consuming. Children should be taught to pray before taking food. The house rule should be: No food before prayer and thanking the Lord. Lord further states that helping others is divine:

Living beings are sustained from food grains; grains are produced by sacrificial work (or duty performed by farmers and other field workers). Duty is prescribed in the scriptures. Scriptures come from the Supreme Being. Thus the all-pervading Supreme Being or God is ever present in selfless service. (3.14-15)

One who does not help to keep the wheel of creation in motion by sacrificial duty (Seva) and rejoices in sense pleasures, that sinful person lives in vain. (3.16)

A grain of wheat is a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains (John 12.24). Saints, trees, rivers, and earth are for the use of others. However, there is no prescribed duty for the enlightened ones as explained below:

For one who rejoices only with the Supreme Being, who is delighted with the Supreme Being, and who is content with the Supreme Being alone, for such a Self-realized person there is no duty. Such a person has no interest, whatsoever, in what is done or what is not done. A Self-realized person does not depend on anybody, except God, for anything. (3.17-18)

All duties, obligations, prohibitions, regulations, and injunctions are meant to lead one to perfection. Therefore, a perfect yogi who has Self-knowledge, detachment, and devotion has nothing more to gain in this world by doing worldly duty.

LEADERS SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE

Always perform your duty efficiently and without any selfish attachment to the results because by doing work without attachment, one reaches the supreme goal of life. (3.19)

In no other scripture, written before the Bhagavad-Gita, has the philosophy of KarmaYoga — unselfish devotion for the welfare of humanity — been so beautifully expounded. Lord Krishna has elevated the idea of altruism to the highest form of worship and spiritual practice. By altruism, one obtains grace, by grace one gets faith, and by faith the ultimate Truth is revealed. One immediately feels better by helping others and comes one step closer to perfection. Swami Vivekananda said: Work done for others awakens the subtle and dormant divine power, Kundalini, within our body. An example of attaining Self-realization by persons while doing their worldly duties is given below:

King Janaka and many others attained perfection of Self-realization by selfless service (KarmaYoga) alone. You also should perform your duty with a view to guide people and for the welfare of society. (3.20)

Those who do selfless service are not bound by Karma and attain salvation (VP 1.22.52). Nothing is beyond the reach of those who have others' interest in mind. Swami Harihar says: Selfless service to humanity is the true service to God and the highest form of worship.

Because whatever noble persons do, others follow. Whatever standard they set up, the world follows. (3.21)

People follow whatever great persons do (BP 5.04.15). Jesus said: I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you (John 13.15). A leader is obliged to set higher ethical, moral, and spiritual standards for the general population to follow. If the leader fails in this regard, the quality of the nation's life declines, and the progress of society is greatly hampered. Therefore, leaders have a great burden on their shoulders. The life of a true leader is the life of service and sacrifice. Leadership should not be an enterprise for becoming rich or famous.

O Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds — heaven, earth, and the lower regions — that should be done by Me, nor there is anything unobtained that I should obtain, yet I engage in action. (3.22)

If I do not engage in action relentlessly, O Arjuna, people would follow the same path in every way. These worlds would perish if I did not work, and I

would be the cause of confusion and destruction. (3.23-24)

WHAT SHOULD THE WISE DO TO THE IGNORANT?

The ignorant work with attachment to the fruits of work for themselves, and the wise should work without attachment for the welfare of the society. (3.25)

The wise should not unsettle the minds of the ignorant who are attached to the fruits of work, but should inspire others by performing all works efficiently without selfish attachment. (See also 3.29) (3.26)

Doing one's duty without a personal, selfish motive is an exalted state given only to the enlightened ones. This may be beyond comprehension of ordinary people. The mark of genius lies in the ability to handle two opposed ideas and paradoxes, such as living in the world with detached attachment. Most people work hard only when they have some motivating force, such as enjoyment of the fruits of work. Such persons should not be discouraged or condemned. They should be introduced slowly to the beginning stages of selfless service. The excessive attachment to possessions, not the possessions themselves, becomes the source of misery.

Just as one has to pray and worship with single-minded attention, similarly, one should perform worldly duties with full attention, even while knowing full well that the world and its affairs are transitory. One should not live thinking only of God and neglecting one's duty in the world. Yogananda said: Be as earnest about meditation as about earning money. One should not live a one-sided life. The importance of controlling the senses and ways to combat ego are given below:

ALL WORKS ARE THE WORKS OF NATURE

The forces (Gunas) of Nature do all work, but due to delusion of ignorance people assume themselves to be the doer. (See also 5.09, 13.29, and 14.19) (3.27)

Indirectly, God is the doer of everything. The power and the will of God do everything. One is not free even to kill oneself. One cannot feel the presence of the omnipresent God as long as one feels: "I am the doer". If one realizes — by the grace of God — that one is not the doer, but just an instrument, one at once becomes free. A Karmic bondage is created if we consider ourselves the doer and enjoyer. The same work done by a Self-realized master and an ordinary person produces different results. The work done by a Self-realized master becomes

spiritualized and produces no Karmic bondage because a Self-realized person does not consider oneself the doer or the enjoyer. The work done by an ordinary person produces Karmic bondage.

One who knows the truth about the role of the forces of Nature in getting work done, does not become attached to work. Such a person knows that it is the forces of Nature that get their work done by using our organs as instruments. (3.28)

Those who are deluded by the illusive power (Maya) of Nature become attached to the work done by the forces of Nature. The wise should not disturb the mind of the ignorant whose knowledge is imperfect. (See also 3.26) (3.29)

The enlightened one should not try to dissuade or detract ignorant ones from performing selfish actions that they do, deluded by the forces of Nature, because doing work — and not the renunciation of work in the initial stages — will ultimately lead them to realize the truth that we are not the doers, but divine instruments only. Working with attachment also has a place in the development of society and in the life of common people. People can easily transcend selfish desires by working for a noble goal of their choice.

Do your prescribed duty, dedicating all work to Me in a spiritual frame of mind, free from desire, attachment, and mental grief. (3.30)

Those who always practice this teaching of Mine — with faith and free from cavil — become free from the bondage of Karma. But those who carp at this teaching and do not practice it, should be considered ignorant, senseless, and confused. (3.31-32)

All beings follow their nature. Even the wise act according to their own nature. If we are but pawns of our nature, what, then, is the value of sense restraint? (3.33)

While we cannot and should not suppress our nature, we must not become victims but rather controllers and masters of the senses by using the discriminative faculties of human life for gradual improvement. The best way to control the senses is to engage all our senses in the service of God.

TWO MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCKS ON THE PATH OF PERFECTION

Attachments and aversions for sense objects remain in the senses. One should not come under the control of these two because they are two

major stumbling blocks, indeed, on one's path of Self-realization. (3.34)

'Attachment' may be defined as a very strong desire to experience sensual pleasures again and again. 'Aversion' is the strong dislike for the unpleasant. The search for peace of mind, comfort, and happiness is the basis of all human endeavors, including the acquisition and propagation of knowledge. Desire — like any other power given by the Lord — is not the problem. We can have desires with a proper frame of mind that gives us control over attachments and aversions. If we can manage our wants, most of the things we possess become dispensable rather than essential. With a right attitude, we can get mastery over all our attachments and aversions. The only necessity is to have a frame of mind that makes most items unnecessary. Those who have knowledge, detachment, and devotion have neither likes nor dislikes for any worldly object, person, place, or work. Personal likes and dislikes disturb the equanimity of mind and become a hindrance on the path of spiritual progress.

One should act with a sense of duty without being governed by personal likes and dislikes. Selfless service is the only austerity and penance in this age by which anyone can reach God while living and working in modern society without going to the mountains and jungles.

Everybody benefits if work is done for the Lord, just as every part of the tree gets water when water is put at the root of the tree rather than on individual leaves. Attachments and aversions are destroyed in a noble person at the onset of Self-knowledge and detachment. Personal likes and dislikes are two major obstacles on the path of perfection. One who has conquered attachments and aversions becomes a free person and attains salvation by doing one's natural duty as stated below:

One's inferior natural work is better than superior unnatural work. Even death in carrying out one's (natural) duty is useful. Unnatural work produces too much stress. (See also 18.47) (3.35)

One who does the duty ordained by nature is freed from the bonds of Karma and slowly rises above the worldly plane (BP 7.11.32). One who takes on work that was not meant for him or her certainly courts failure. One evolves by the work best suited to one's own nature or inborn tendencies. There is no perfect occupation. Every occupation in this world has some faults. One should keep oneself free from concern over the faults of one's duty in life. One should carefully study one's nature to determine an appropriate occupation. Natural work does not produce stress and is conducive to creativity. Walking uphill, vocationally, against one's natural tendencies is not only more stressful but also less

productive, and it does not provide opportunity and leisure time for spiritual growth and development. On the other hand, if one follows a very easy or artistic path, one may not be able to earn enough to satisfy the basic necessities of (family) life. Therefore, lead a simple life by limiting unnecessary luxuries, and develop a hobby of selfless service to balance the material and spiritual needs of life. The balanced life is a happy life.

LUST IS THE ORIGIN OF SIN

Arjuna said: O Krishna, what impels one to commit sin or selfish deeds as if unwillingly and forced against one's will? (3.36)

Lord Krishna said: It is the lust, born out of passion, that becomes anger when unfulfilled. Lust is insatiable and is a great devil. Know this as the enemy. (3.37)

The mode of passion is the absence of mental equilibrium leading to vigorous activity to achieve desired fruits. Lust, the passionate selfish desire for all sensual and material pleasures, is the product of the mode of passion. Lust becomes anger if it is unfulfilled. When the attainment of fruits is hindered or interrupted, the intense desire for their achievement turns into fierce rage. Hence, the Lord says that lust and anger are two mighty enemies that can lead one to commit sin and turn one astray from the path of Self-realization, the supreme goal of human life. Actually, mundane desire compels a person to engage in sinful activities in spite of his or her will. Control your wants because whatever you want wants you. Lord Buddha said: Selfish desire is the root of all evils and misery.

As a fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, similarly, Self-knowledge gets covered by different degrees of this insatiable lust, the eternal enemy of the wise. (3.38-39)

Lust and Self-knowledge are eternal enemies. Lust can be destroyed only by Self-knowledge. Where lust resides and how one should control the senses to subjugate lust, are given below:

The senses, the mind, and the intellect are said to be the seat of lust. Lust deludes a person by controlling the senses, the mind, and the intellect and veils Self-knowledge. (3.40)

Therefore, by controlling the senses, first kill this devil of material desires (or lust) that destroys Self-knowledge and Self-realization. (3.41)

The mighty enemy, lust, enslaves the intellect by using the mind as its friend and senses and sense objects as its soldiers. These soldiers keep the individual soul deluded and obscure Absolute Truth as a part of the drama of life. The success or failure of our role in action depends on how we handle our individual role and reach our destiny.

All desires cannot — and need not — be eliminated, but selfish desires and motives must be eliminated for spiritual progress. All our actions by thought, word and deed, including desires, should be directed to glorify God and for the good of humanity. The scriptures say: The mortal, when freed from the captivity of selfish desires, becomes immortal and attains liberation even in this very life (KaU 6.14, BrU 4.04.07).

HOW TO CONTROL LUST AND REACH THE GOAL

The senses are said to be superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind; and the Self is superior to the intellect. (See also KaU 3.10-11, 6.07-08 and MB 12.204.10) (3.42)

Thus, knowing the Self to be the highest, and controlling the mind by the intellect, one must kill this mighty enemy, lust, O Arjuna. (See also KaU 3.03-06) (3.43)

Uncontrolled worldly desires will ruin the beautiful spiritual journey of life. The scriptures provide ways and means of keeping the desires born in the mind under proper control. The body may be compared to a chariot upon which the individual soul — as passenger, owner, and enjoyer — is riding on a spiritual journey towards the Supreme Abode of the Lord. Duty and devotion are the two wheels of the chariot, and the power of faith is its axle. Dharma (righteousness) is the road, and the divine qualities (See 16.01-03) are the milestones. The scriptures are the guiding lights to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Sense objects are the roadside green grasses; likes and dislikes for sense objects, people, and places are the two major stumbling blocks on the path (See 3.34); and lust, anger, greed, pride, attachment, and envy are the roadside plunderers. Friends and relatives are fellow travelers whom we temporarily meet during the journey.

Intellect is the driver of this chariot. The five senses are the horses. The success of the spiritual journey depends largely on the strength and skill of the driver, the intellect, to control the mind and five sense-horses.

In the hierarchy, the more powerful controls the less powerful. Thus, the senses can be controlled by the mind, because mind is the King of senses. The mind is

certainly very difficult to control, but it can be controlled by steady practice and detachment (See 6.33-36). Steady practice and detachment may be compared to two chords of the rein to control the mind. The mind can be controlled by the intellect with the help of the rein. Also the whip of moral conduct and discipline (See Yama and Niyama in PYS 2.30-32) is used to subdue the mind and senses.

If intellect is not powerful enough to control the mind, the passenger will not reach the goal. Self-knowledge is superior to the intellect. The intellect yoked with the Self through Self-knowledge and contemplation becomes pure and strong to control the mind and the mind will control the senses. Thus it can be seen that Self-knowledge is essential for the success of the spiritual journey. Self-knowledge provides power of purification (See 4.37-38), scriptures supply necessary tools (the rein and the whip), and techniques to the intellect to be able to control the mind.

The sense-horses must be kept under control of the mind, and the mind under control of the intellect at all times. A single moment of carelessness may lead the seeker to a downfall. A weak intellect will not be able to control the mind and senses. If intellect is weak, natural desires for material and sensual pleasures of the senses will control the mind instead of mind controlling the senses. The mind and senses will attack and take control of intellect, the weak driver, and lead the passenger away from the goal of salvation into the ditch of transmigration (See 2.67).

Finally, one must cross the river of illusion (Maya) and — by using the bridge of meditation and the silent repetitive chanting of Lord's name or a mantra to still the ripples of mind waves — reach the spiritual shore of trance. Those who cannot control the senses will not be able to attain Self-realization, the goal of human birth.

One must not spoil oneself by wrongful temporary pleasures of the senses. One who can control the senses can control the whole world and achieve success in all endeavors. Passion cannot be completely eliminated, but is subdued by Self-knowledge. The intellect becomes polluted during the youthful years, just as the clear water of a river becomes muddy during the rainy season. Keeping good company and setting a higher goal of life prevent the mind and intellect from becoming tainted by the distractions of sensual pleasures. Those who cannot control the senses may not also be able to be successful in studies and attain career goals.

4. PATH OF RENUNCIATION WITH KNOWLEDGE

KARMA-YOGA IS AN ANCIENT FORGOTTEN COMMANDMENT

Lord Krishna said: I taught this KarmaYoga, the eternal science of right action, to King Vivasvan. Vivasvan taught it to Manu; Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. Thus, the saintly Kings knew this science of proper action (KarmaYoga), handed down in succession. After a long time, this science was lost from this earth. Today, I have described the same ancient science to you because you are my sincere devotee and friend. This science is a supreme secret indeed. (4.01-03)

KarmaYoga, discussed in the previous chapter, is declared by the Lord as the supreme secret science of right action. According to Swami Karmananda, a practitioner of KarmaYoga, unless Lord Himself reveals this secret science, no one can practice or even understand it.

Arjuna said: You were born later, but Vivasvan was born in ancient time. How am I to understand that You taught this science in the beginning of the creation? (4.04)

Arjuna questions how Krishna, a contemporary of Arjuna, could have taught this science of KarmaYoga to King Vivasvan, who was born earlier in ancient times, long before Lord Krishna. The doctrine of Bhagavad-Gita is not just five thousand years old; it is primeval. Lord Krishna restated it in the Gita for the benefit of humanity. All great masters come to rekindle the fire of forgotten Truth. Different people have said everything we hear or read at different times.

THE PURPOSE OF INCARNATION OF GOD

Lord Krishna said: Both you and I have taken many births. I remember them all, O Arjuna, but you do not remember. (4.05)

Though I am eternal, immutable, and the Lord (Ishvara, controller) of all beings, yet I manifest Myself by controlling material Nature, using My own divine potential energy, Yoga-Maya. (See also 10.14) (4.06)

Yoga-māyā (Divine Light, Brahma-jyoti, Noor) is the creative power (Ānanda-śakti) of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Mahā-māyā is the fractional reflection of Yoga-māyā. Kāla-māyā is the reflection of Mahā-māyā. And the illusory energy (Māyā) is the supernatural, extraordinary, and mystic power of Eternal Being (Brahma). Mahā-

māyā, Kāla-māyā, and Māyā are also called Ādi Prakṛti; and Prakṛti, the material Nature, is considered the reflection of Māyā. Thus Yoga-māyā is the origin of both Māyā and Prakṛti. Guru Nanak said: "He has created Māyā that deceives and controls us." The word 'Māyā' also means unreal, illusory, or deceptive image of Reality. Due to the power of Māyā, one considers the universe existent and distinct from Eternal Being (Brahma). The Eternal Light (Brahma-jyoti, Noor, Yoga-māyā) is the invisible potential energy; Māyā is kinetic energy, the force of action of Brahma. They are inseparable like fire and heat. Māyā is also used as a metaphor to explain the visible world (Jagat) to common people.

Whenever there is a decline of Dharma (Righteousness) and a predominance of Adharma (Unrighteousness), O Arjuna, I manifest Myself. I appear from time to time for protecting the good, for transforming the wicked, and for establishing world order (Dharma). (4.07-08)

The Supreme Being is both divine and human (AV 4.16.08). Prophets appear from time to time as divine dispensation sees the need for the welfare of society. Whenever miscreants are born to destroy world order (Dharma), the good Lord, Vishnu, incarnates to put everything in proper balance (VR 7.08.27). His compassion is the main reason for Lord's incarnation (SBS 49). There are other reasons besides the protection of righteousness (Dharma), for the Lord's incarnation. The Supreme Being, which is beyond birth and death, incarnates in human form through a great soul on earth to satisfy the longings of devotees who want to see Him and be in His personal presence. Saint Tulasidasa said: Though devoid of material attributes, unattached, and immutable, yet for the love of His votaries, the Lord assumes a form with attributes (TR 2.218.03).

Lord performs many ordinary, human, and also uncommon or controversial pastimes just to please His devotees or to set things right. Ordinary human beings cannot understand the reasons behind these pastimes and, therefore, should not pass judgment on Lord's activities when He incarnates. Great personalities and incarnations are sometimes known to be acting contrary to the scriptural rules, just as a King has the freedom to break certain rules. These acts are done for a very good purpose and with a reason beyond human comprehension. One should neither criticize nor follow such acts.

Saints and sages also reincarnate by the will of Krishna. Ramakrishna said that he would live in a subtle body for three hundred years in the hearts and minds of his devotees. Yogananda said: So long as people in this

world are crying for help, I shall return to ply my boat and offer to take them to heavenly shores.

One who truly understands My transcendental appearance, and activities of creation, maintenance, and dissolution, attains My Supreme Abode and is not born again after leaving this body, O Arjuna. (4.09)

One develops love for Krishna by studying and listening to the transcendental birth and sportive acts of the Lord as narrated by the saints and sages in the scriptures. True understanding of the transcendental nature of Lord's form, His incarnation, and His activities, is the Self-knowledge that leads to salvation.

Many have become free from attachment, fear, anger, and attained salvation by taking refuge in Me, by becoming fully absorbed in My thoughts and by getting purified by the fire of Self-knowledge. (4.10)

PATH OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER

With whatever motive people worship Me, I fulfill their desires accordingly. People worship Me with different motives, O Arjuna. (4.11)

Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11.09). It is due to divine illusion (Maya) that most people seek temporary material gains, such as health, wealth, and success, and not Self-knowledge and devotion to His lotus feet.

Those who long for success in their work here on earth worship the celestial controllers, Devas. Success in work comes quickly in this human world. (4.12)

No one, including all Devas, and Brahm, has his or her own power. They all derive their powers from the Supreme Being, ParaBrahm.

Would you give to your son a stone when he asks you for bread? Your Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7.09-11). When you ask for something in prayer, have faith and believe that you have received it, and it will be given to you (Mark 11.24). In prayer one asks the Lord's help in getting what one needs; in worship one adores, glorifies, and thanks Him for what one has. One should first be aware of and contemplate one's plight, feel helpless in getting out of the difficulty, then seek divine help — through prayer — in a state of helplessness with intense faith. Lord will take the first step if you know your plight and seek His help for transformation. Show yourself — open up, confess — to the Lord as you are in prayer; be specific in what you ask; and cry for His help.

All prayers are answered, but prayers for the benefit of others are given first priority. Lord actually knows our needs at all times and is simply waiting to be asked for help due to our free will. Meditation is listening to God by stilling the mind and assuming a receptive posture in order to hear Lord's instructions, insights, and revelations. For example, embrace the attitude: Thank You for answering my prayers and for all You have given me, but now what do You want me to do with what You have given? Then, having said that, be still and alert, and just try to listen. Pray so that you can talk to God and tell Him how you are and what you have been doing. Meditate so that God can effectively tell you what you are supposed to do.

DIVISION OF LABOR IS BASED ON THE APTITUDE OF PEOPLE

I created the four divisions of human society based on aptitude and vocation. Though I am the author of this system of division of labor, one should know that I do nothing directly, and I am eternal. (See also 18.41) (4.13)

Work or Karma does not bind Me because I have no desire for the fruits of work. One who fully understands and practices this truth is also not bound by Karma. (4.14)

Those who want to be first must place themselves last and be the servant of all (Mark 10.44). All works, including prayers, should be undertaken for a just cause, rather than just for personal gain.

The ancient seekers of salvation also performed their duties without concern for the fruits. Therefore, you should do your duty as the ancients did. (4.15)

ATTACHED, DETACHED, AND FORBIDDEN ACTION

Even the wise are confused about what is action and what is inaction. Therefore, I shall clearly explain what is action, knowing that one shall be liberated from the evil of birth and death. (4.16)

The true nature of action is very difficult to understand. Therefore, one should know the nature of attached action, the nature of detached action, and also the nature of forbidden action. (4.17)

Attached action is selfish work, done in the mode of passion that produces Karmic bondage and leads to transmigration. Detached action is unselfish work, done in the mode of goodness that leads to salvation.

Detached action is considered to be inaction because from the Karmic viewpoint, it is as if no action was performed. Action forbidden by the scriptures, done in the mode of ignorance, is harmful to both the doer and society. It creates misfortunes here and hereafter.

A KARMA-YOGI IS NOT SUBJECT TO THE KARMIC LAWS

One who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, is a wise person. Such a person is a yogi and has accomplished everything. (See also 3.05, 3.27, 5.08 and 13.29) (4.18)

All acts are the acts of Eternal Being's (Brahma's) Divine Light (BrahmaJyoti, Noor), the inactively active actor. The Bible says: The words you speak are not yours; they come from the Spirit of your Father (Matthew 10.20). The wise perceive the inactive, infinite, and invisible reservoir of potential energy of the Supreme as the ultimate source of all visible kinetic energy in the cosmos, just as invisible electricity runs a fan. The urge and power to do action come from the Supreme Being. Therefore, one should spiritualize all work by perceiving that one does nothing at all and everything is done by the energy of the Supreme Being, using us only as an instrument.

One whose desires have become selfless by being roasted in the fire of Self-realization, is called a sage by the wise. (4.19)

One who has abandoned selfish attachment to the fruits of work and remains ever content and dependent on no one but God, such a person — though engaged in activity — does nothing at all and incurs no Karmic reaction. (4.20)

One who is free from desires, whose mind and senses are under control, and who has renounced all proprietorship, does not incur sin — the Karmic reaction — by doing bodily action. (4.21)

A KarmaYogi — who is content with whatever gain comes naturally by His will, who is unaffected by pairs of opposites, and free from envy, tranquil in success and failure — is not bound by Karma. (4.22)

All Karmic bonds of a KarmaYogi — who is free from attachment, whose mind is fixed in Self-knowledge, and who does work as a service to the Lord — dissolve away. (4.23)

The divine Spirit (Brahma, Eternal Being) has become everything. The Divinity (Brahma, Self, Spirit) shall be realized by one who considers everything as a manifestation (or an act) of Brahma. (Also see 9.16) (4.24)

Life itself is an ever-burning fire where sacrificial ceremony is going on constantly. Every action must be thought of as a holy sacrifice, a holy act. Everything is not the Eternal Being (Brahma), but Brahma is the root or basis of everything. One attains salvation and becomes one with Brahma, without losing one's identity, when one perceives Brahma in every action, perceives the things one uses as a transformation of Brahma, and realizes that the very process of all action is also Brahma. Thus salvation or Mukti is not the destruction of individual soul (Jeeva), but the realization of one's true nature that Jeeva is like Brahma.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OR SACRIFICES

Some yogis perform the service of worship to celestial controllers (Devas), while others offer sacrifice (of reasoning, Viveka) to the fire of the Eternal Being (Brahma) by performing the sacrifice of Self-knowledge. (4.25)

Some offer their hearing and other senses as sacrifice in the fires of restraint; others offer sound and other objects of the senses (as sacrifice) in the fires of the senses. (4.26)

Others offer all the functions of the senses and the functions of the five bioimpulses (life forces) as sacrifice in the fire of self-restraint that is kindled by Self-knowledge. (4.27)

Others offer their wealth, their austerity, and their practice of yoga as sacrifice, while the ascetics with strict vows offer their study of scriptures and knowledge as sacrifice. (4.28)

Those who engage in yogic practices reach the breathless state of trance by offering inhalation into exhalation and exhalation into inhalation as a sacrifice (by using short breathing Kriya techniques). (4.29)

Deep spiritual meaning and interpretation of the practical yogic verses (4.29, 4.30, 5.27, 6.13, 8.10, 8.12, 8.13, 8.24, and 8.25) cannot be explained here. They should be acquired from a Self-realized master of KriyaYoga.

The breathing process can be slowed down by:
(1) watching the breath going in and coming out as one

watches the ocean waves going up and down, (2) practicing of diaphragmatic (or deep yogic) breathing, and (3) using yogic techniques and KriyaYoga. The aim of yogic practice is to achieve the superconscious or breathless state of trance by gradually mastering the breathing process.

Others restrict their diet and offer their inhalations as sacrifice into their inhalations. All these people are the knowers of sacrifice and their minds become purified by their sacrifice. (4.30)

Those who perform selfless service obtain the nectar of Self-knowledge as a result of their sacrifice and attain the Supreme Being. O Arjuna, if even this world is not a happy place for the non-sacrificer, how can the other world be? (See also 4.38, and 5.06). (4.31)

Many types of spiritual disciplines are described in the Vedas. Know that all of them are the action of body, mind, and senses prompted by the forces of Nature. Understanding this, one shall attain Nirvana or salvation. (See also 3.14) (4.32)

In order to attain salvation, spiritual discipline or sacrifice should be performed as a duty without attachment and with full understanding that oneself is not the doer.

A SUPERIOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The acquisition and propagation of Self-knowledge are superior to any material gain or gift because purification of mind and intellect eventually leads to the dawn of transcendental knowledge and Self-realization — the sole purpose of any spiritual practice. (4.33)

Acquire this transcendental knowledge from a Self-realized master by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The empowered ones, who have realized the Truth, will teach you. (4.34)

Contact with great souls who have realized the truth is helpful. Reading scriptures, giving charity, and doing spiritual practices alone may not give God-realization. Only a God-realized soul can awaken and kindle another soul. But no guru can give a secret formula for Self-realization without His grace. The Vedas say: One who knows the land gives direction to the one who does not know and asks (RV 9.70.09). It is also said that the precepts of Truth are essentially an individual process. People discover the truth by their own efforts.

One has to row his or her boat through the turbulent waters of this material world.

The Vedas prohibit the sale of God in any form. They say: O mighty Lord of countless wealth, I will not sell thee for any price (RV 8.01.05). The role of a guru is that of a guide and a giver, not of a taker. Before accepting a human guru, one must first have — or develop — full faith in the guru and leave the guru's human frailties out of consideration, take the pearls of wisdom and throw away the oyster shells. If this is not possible, it should be remembered that the word 'guru' also means the light of Self-knowledge that dispels ignorance and delusion; and the light comes — automatically — from the Supreme Being, the internal guru, when one's mind is purified by selfless service, spiritual practice, and surrender.

There are four categories of gurus: A false guru, guru, realized guru, and the divine guru. In this age too many false gurus are coming to teach or just give a mantra for a price. These false gurus are the merchants of mantra. They take money from disciples to fulfill their personal material needs without giving the true knowledge of the Supreme Being. Jesus also said: Watch out for false prophets; they come to you looking like sheep on the outside, but they are really like wild wolves on the inside (Matthew 7.15). Saint Tulasidasa said that a guru who takes money from disciples and does not remove their ignorance, goes to hell (TR 7.98.04). A guru is one who imparts true knowledge and complete understanding of the Absolute and the temporal. A realized guru is a Self-realized master mentioned in this verse here. A realized guru helps the devotee maintain God-consciousness all the time by his or her own vested spiritual power.

When the mind and intellect are purified, Supreme Lord, the divine guru, reflects Himself in the inner psyche of a devotee and sends a guru or a realized guru to him or her. A real guru is a giver. He never asks any money or a fee from a disciple because he depends on God only. A real guru would not ask anything from a disciple for personal or even for organizational gain. However, a disciple is obliged to do the best he or she can to help the cause of the guru. It is said that one should not accept any fee from a pupil without giving full instruction and understanding of the Absolute, divine kinetic energy (Maya), temporal material Nature, and the living entity (BrU 4.01.02).

The Spirit within us is the divine guru. Outside teachers only help us in the beginning of the spiritual journey. Our own intellect — when purified by selfless service, prayer, meditation, worship, silent chanting of Lord's name, congregational chanting of holy names, and scriptural study — becomes the best channel and

guide for the flow of divine knowledge (See also Gita 4.38, and 13.22). The Divine Being within all of us is the real guru, and one must learn how to tune in with Him. It is said that there is no greater guru than one's own pure mind. A pure mind becomes a spiritual guide and the inner divine guru leading to a real guru and Self-realization. This is expressed by the common saying that the guru comes to a person when he or she is ready. The word 'guru' also means vast and is used to describe the Supreme Being — the divine guru and internal guide.

The wise spiritual master disapproves the idea of blind personal service, or the guru cult, which is so common in India. A Self-realized (SR) master says that God only is the guru, and all are His disciples. A disciple should be like a bee seeking honey from flowers. If the bee does not get honey from one flower, it immediately goes to another flower and stays at that flower as long as it gets the nectar. Idolization and blind worship of a human guru may become a stumbling block in spiritual progress and is harmful to both the disciple and the guru.

After knowing the transcendental science, O Arjuna, you shall not again become deluded like this. With this knowledge you shall see the entire creation within your own higher Self and thus within Me. (See also 6.29, 6.30, 11.07, 11.13) (4.35)

The same life-force of the Supreme Being reflects in all living beings to support and activate them. Therefore, we are all part and parcel of the cosmic energy of Brahma, the Self, and connected with each other. At the dawn of enlightenment, one merges within the Absolute (Gita 18.55), and all diversities appear as nothing but the expansion of one's own higher Self.

Even if one is the most sinful of all sinners, one shall cross over the river of sin by the raft of Self-knowledge. (4.36)

The fire of Self-knowledge reduces all bonds of Karma to ashes, O Arjuna, like the blazing fire reduces wood to ashes. (4.37)

The Bible also says: You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8.32). The fire of Self-knowledge burns all past Karma — the root cause of the soul's transmigration — just as fire instantly burns a mountain of cotton. The present action does not produce any new Karma because the wise know that all work is done by the forces of nature; therefore, people are not the doer. Thus, when Self-knowledge dawns, only a part of the past Karma, known as fate that is responsible for the present birth, has to be exhausted before freedom from transmigration is attained by the enlightened person.

The physical body and mind generate new Karma; the subtle body carries the fate; and the causal

body is the repository of past Karma. Karma produces body, and body generates Karma. Thus, the cycle of birth and death continues indefinitely. Only selfless service can break this cycle, and selfless service is not possible without Self-knowledge. Thus, transcendental knowledge breaks the bonds of Karma and leads to salvation. This knowledge does not manifest to a sinful person — or to any person whose time to receive the spiritual knowledge has not come.

Loss and gain, life and death, fame and infamy lie in the hands of one's Karma. Fate is all-powerful. This being so, one should neither be angry nor blame anybody (TR 2.171.01). People know virtue and vice, but one's choice is ordained by fate or Karmic footprints because the mind and intellect are controlled by fate. When success does not come in spite of best efforts, it may be concluded that fate precedes endeavor.

TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE IS AUTOMATICALLY REVEALED TO A KARMA-YOGI

Truly, there is no purifier in this world like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being. One discovers this knowledge within, naturally, in course of time when one's mind is cleansed of selfishness by KarmaYoga. (See also 4.31, 5.06, and 18.78). (4.38)

The intense fire of devotion to God burns all Karma and purifies and illuminates the mind and intellect just as sunlight illumines the earth (BP 11.03.40). Selfless service should be performed to the best of one's ability until purity of mind is attained (DB 7.34.15). True knowledge of the Self is automatically reflected in a pure consciousness (Chitta). KarmaYoga cleanses the dirt of selfishness from the mind and prepares it to receive Self-knowledge. Selfless service (KarmaYoga) and Self-knowledge are thus the two wings to take one to salvation.

One who has faith in God, is sincere in yogic practice, and has control over the mind and senses, gains this transcendental knowledge. Having gained this knowledge, one quickly attains supreme peace or liberation. (4.39)

The fires of mental grief and sorrows, born of attachment, can be completely extinguished by the water of Self-knowledge (MB 3.02.26). There is no basis for right thought and action without Self-knowledge.

The irrational, the faithless, and the disbeliever (atheist) perish. There is neither this world nor the world beyond nor happiness for a disbeliever. (4.40)

BOTH TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND KARMA-YOGA ARE NEEDED FOR NIRVANA

Work does not bind a person who has renounced work — by renouncing the fruits of work — through KarmaYoga and whose confusion with regard to body and Spirit is completely destroyed by Self-knowledge, O Arjuna. (4.41)

Therefore, cut the ignorance-born confusion with regard to body and Spirit by the sword of Self-knowledge, resort to KarmaYoga, and get up for the war, O Arjuna. (4.42)

5. PATH OF RENUNCIATION

Arjuna asked: O Krishna, You praise the path of transcendental knowledge, and also the path of selfless service (KarmaYoga). Tell me, definitely, which one is the better of the two paths? (See also 5.05) (5.01)

Renunciation means complete renouncement of doership, ownership, and selfish motive behind an action, not the renunciation of work or worldly objects. Renunciation comes only after the dawn of Self-knowledge. Therefore, the words 'renunciation' and 'Self-knowledge' are used interchangeably in the Gita. Renunciation is considered the goal of life. Selfless service (Seva, KarmaYoga) and Self-knowledge are the necessary means to achieve the goal. True renunciation is attaching all action and possession — including body, mind, and thought — to the service of the Supreme.

Lord Krishna said: The path of Self-knowledge and the path of selfless service both lead to the supreme goal. But of the two, the path of selfless service is superior to path of Self-knowledge because it is easier to practice for most people. (5.02)

A person should be considered a true renunciant who has neither attachment nor aversion for anything. One is easily liberated from Karmic bondage by becoming free from attachment and aversion. (5.03)

BOTH PATHS LEAD TO THE SUPREME

The ignorant — not the wise — consider the path of Self-knowledge and the path of selfless service (KarmaYoga) as different from each other. The person who has truly mastered one, gets the benefits of both. (5.04)

Whatever goal a renunciant reaches, a KarmaYogi also reaches the same goal. Therefore, one who sees the path of renunciation and the path of unselfish work as the same, really sees. (See also 6.01 and 6.02) (5.05)

But true renunciation (the renunciation of doership and ownership), O Arjuna, is difficult to attain without KarmaYoga. A sage equipped with KarmaYoga quickly attains Nirvana. (See also 4.31, 4.38, 5.08) (5.06)

Selfless service (KarmaYoga) provides the preparation, discipline, and purification necessary for renunciation. Self-knowledge is the upper limit of KarmaYoga, and renunciation of doership and ownership is the upper limit of Self-knowledge.

A KarmaYogi, whose mind is pure, whose mind and senses are under control, and who sees one and the same Spirit in all beings, is not bound by Karma, though engaged in work. (5.07)

A TRANSCENDENTALIST DOES NOT CONSIDER ONESELF AS THE DOER

The wise who know the truth think: "I do nothing at all." In seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, breathing, speaking, giving, taking, as well as opening and closing the eyes; the wise believe that only the senses are operating upon their objects. (See also 3.27, 13.29, and 14.19) (5.08-09)

Senses need not be subdued if the activities of the senses are spiritualized by perceiving that all work, good or bad, is done by the powers of God.

A KARMA-YOGI WORKS FOR GOD

One who does all work as an offering to God — abandoning selfish attachment to results — remains untouched by Karmic reaction or sin, just as a lotus leaf never gets wet by water. (5.10)

A KarmaYogi does not work with selfish motives and therefore does not incur any sin. Selfless service is always sinless. Selfishness is the mother of sin. One becomes happy, peaceful, purified, and enlightened by performing one's prescribed duties as an offering to God while remaining detached inwardly.

The KarmaYogis perform action — without selfish attachment — with their body, mind, intellect, and senses only for the purification of their mind and intellect. (5.11)

A KarmaYogi attains Supreme peace by abandoning attachment to the fruits of work, while others who are attached to the fruits of work become bound by selfish work. (5.12)

THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE

A person, who has completely renounced the attachment to the fruits of all work from his or her mind, dwells happily in the City of Nine Gates, neither performing nor directing action. (5.13)

The human body has been called the City of Nine Gates (or openings) in the scriptures. The nine openings are: Two openings each for the eyes, ears, and nose; and one each for the mouth, anus, and urethra. The Lord of all beings and the universe who resides in this city as an individual soul or the living entity (Jiva) is called the Spiritual Being (Purush) performing and directing all action.

The Lord neither creates the urge for action nor the feeling of doership nor the attachment to the results of action in people. The powers of material Nature do all these. (5.14)

The Lord does not take responsibility for the good or evil deeds of anybody. The veil of ignorance covers Self-knowledge; thereby people become deluded and do evil deeds. (5.15)

God does not punish or reward anybody. We ourselves do this by the misuse or the right use of our own power of reasoning and free will. Bad things happen to good people to make them better.

Transcendental knowledge destroys the ignorance of the Self and reveals the Supreme Being, just as the sun reveals the beauty of objects of the world. (5.16)

Persons whose mind and intellect are totally merged in the Eternal Being, who are firmly devoted to the Supreme, who have God as their supreme goal and sole refuge, and whose impurities are destroyed by the knowledge of the Self, do not take birth again. (5.17)

ADDITIONAL MARKS OF AN ENLIGHTENED PERSON

An enlightened person — by perceiving God in all — looks at a learned person, an outcast, even a cow, an elephant, or a dog with an equal eye. (See also 6.29) (5.18)

Just as a person does not consider parts of the body, such as arms and legs, different from the body

itself, similarly a Self-realized person does not consider any living entity different from all pervading Eternal Being (BP 4.07.53). Such a person sees God everywhere, in everything, and in every being. After discovering the metaphysical truth, one looks at everything with reverence, compassion, and kindness because everything in the material world is part and parcel of the cosmic body of Lord Vishnu.

Everything has been accomplished in this very life by one whose mind is set in equality. Such a person has realized the Supreme Being because the Supreme Being is flawless and impartial. (See also 18.55) (5.19)

To have a feeling of equality for everybody is the greatest worship of God (BP 7.08.10). Those who do not have such a feeling discriminate. Therefore, the victims of injustice and discrimination should feel sorry for the discriminator and pray to the Lord for a change of the discriminator's heart rather than get upset, angry, or vengeful.

One who neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant, who has a steady mind, who is undeluded, and who is a knower of the Supreme Being — such a person eternally abides with the Supreme Being. (5.20)

Such a person who is in union with the Supreme Being becomes unattached to external sensual pleasures by discovering the joy of the Self through contemplation and enjoys transcendental bliss. (5.21)

Sensual pleasures are, in fact, the source of misery and have a beginning and an end. Therefore, the wise, O Arjuna, do not rejoice in sensual pleasures. (See also 18.38) (5.22)

The wise constantly reflect on the futility of sensual pleasures that inevitably become the cause of misery; therefore, they do not become victims of sensual cravings.

One who is able to withstand the impulses of lust and anger before death is a yogi and a happy person. (5.23)

One who finds happiness with the Supreme Being, who rejoices with the Supreme Being within, and who is illuminated by Self-knowledge — such a yogi attains Nirvana and goes to the Supreme Being. (5.24)

Seers whose sins (or imperfections) are destroyed, whose doubts about the existence of the Universal Self have been dispelled by Self-knowledge, whose minds are disciplined, and who are engaged in the welfare of all beings, attain the Supreme Being. (5.25)

Those who are free from lust and anger, who have subdued the mind and senses, and who have realized the existence of the Self, easily attain Nirvana. (5.26)

THE THIRD PATH — THE PATH OF DEVOTIONAL MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

A sage is, in truth, liberated by renouncing all sense enjoyments, fixing the eyes and the mind at an imaginary dot between the eye-brows, equalizing the breath moving through the nostrils by using yogic techniques, keeping the senses, mind, and intellect under control, having salvation as the prime goal, and by becoming free from lust, anger, and fear. (5.27-28)

The invisible astral channels of flow of energy in the human body are called Nadis. When the cosmic currents — flowing through Nadis in the astral spinal cord — are separated by the opening of the main Sushumna Nadi by the practice of yogic techniques, breath flows through both nostrils with equal pressure; the mind calms down; and the field is prepared for deep meditation leading to trance.

My devotee attains everlasting peace by knowing the Supreme Being as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, as the great Lord of the entire universe, and as the friend of all beings. (5.29)

6. PATH OF MEDITATION

A KARMA-YOGI IS A RENUNCIANT

Lord Krishna said: One who performs the prescribed duty without seeking its fruit for personal enjoyment is both a renunciant and a KarmaYogi. One does not become a renunciant merely by not lighting the fire, and one does not become a yogi merely by abstaining from work. (6.01)

O Arjuna, renunciation (Samnyasa) is the same as KarmaYoga because, no one becomes a KarmaYogi who has not renounced the selfish motive behind an action. (See also 5.01, 5.05, 6.01, and 18.02) (6.02)

A DEFINITION OF YOGA

For the wise, who seek to attain yoga of meditation or the equanimity of mind, KarmaYoga is said to be the means. For one who has attained yoga, equanimity becomes the means of Self-realization. A person is said to have attained yogic perfection when he or she has no desire for sensual pleasures or attachment to the fruits of work and has renounced all personal selfish motives. (6.03-04)

Yogic perfection can be achieved only when one does all activities for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord Krishna (Chimanbhai). KarmaYoga or unselfish work produces tranquility of mind. When one performs action as a matter of duty without any selfish motive, the mind is not disturbed by the fear of failure; it becomes tranquil, and one attains yogic perfection through meditation. The equanimity of mind necessary for Self-realization comes after giving up personal, selfish motives and desires. Selfishness is the root cause of other impure desires in the mind. The desireless mind becomes peaceful. Thus KarmaYoga is recommended to persons desiring success in yoga of meditation. Perfection in meditation results in control over the senses, bringing forth tranquility of mind that ultimately leads to God-realization.

MIND IS THE BEST FRIEND AS WELL AS THE WORST ENEMY

One must elevate — and not degrade — oneself by one's own mind. The mind alone is one's friend, as well as one's enemy. The mind is the friend of those who have control over it, and the mind acts like an enemy for those who do not control it. (6.05-06)

There is no enemy other than an uncontrolled mind in this world (BP 7.08.10). Therefore, one should first try to control and conquer this enemy by regular practice of meditation with a firm determination and effort. All spiritual practices are aimed towards the conquest of the mind. Guru Nanak said: "Master the mind, and you master the world." Sage Patanjali defines yoga as control over the activities (or the thought waves, Chitta Vritti) of mind and intellect (PYS 1.02). Firm control of the mind and senses is known as yoga (KaU 6.11). Control of the mind and senses is called austerity and yoga (MB 3.209.53). The purpose of meditation is to control the mind so that one can focus on God and live according to His instructions and will. The mind of a yogi is under control; a yogi is not under the control of the mind. Meditation is effortless control of the natural tendency of the mind to wander and tuning it with the

Supreme. Yogi Bhajan says: A one-pointed, relaxed mind is the most powerful and creative mind — it can do anything.

The mind, indeed, is the cause of bondage as well as liberation of the living entity. The mind becomes the cause of bondage when controlled by modes of material Nature, and the same mind, when attached to the Supreme, becomes the cause of salvation (BP 3.25.15). The mind alone is the cause of salvation as well as bondage of human beings. The mind becomes the cause of bondage when controlled by sense objects, and it becomes the cause of salvation when controlled by the intellect (VP 6.07.28). Absolute control over mind and senses is a prerequisite for any spiritual practice for Self-realization. One who has not become the master of the senses cannot progress towards the goal of Self-realization. Therefore, after establishing control over the activities of the mind, one should take the mind away from the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and fix it on God. When the mind is disengaged from sense pleasures and engaged with God, sense impulses become ineffective because the senses obtain their power from the mind. The mind is the ruler of the other five senses. One who becomes master of the mind becomes master of all the senses.

One who has control over the lower self — the mind and senses — is tranquil in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, in honor and dishonor, and remains ever steadfast with the supreme Self. (6.07)

One can realize God only when the mind becomes tranquil and completely free from desires and dualities, such as pain and pleasure. However, people are rarely completely free from desires and duality. But one can become free from the bonds of desire and duality if one uses the mind and senses in the service of the Lord. They who master their mind get the spiritual wealth of knowledge and bliss. Self can only be realized when the lake of the mind becomes still, just as the reflection of the moon is seen in a lake when the water is still. (See also 2.70)

A person is called yogi who has both Self-knowledge and Self-realization, who is tranquil, who has control over the mind and senses, and to whom a clod, a stone, and gold are the same. (6.08)

A person is considered superior who is impartial toward companions, friends, enemies, neutrals, arbiters, haters, relatives, saints, and sinners. (6.09)

TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION

A yogi, seated in solitude and alone, should constantly try to contemplate a mental picture (or just the majesty) of the Supreme Being after bringing the mind and senses under control and becoming free from desires and proprietorship. (6.10)

The place of meditation should have the serenity, solitude, and spiritual atmosphere of odor-free, noise-free, and light-free caves of the Himalayas. Massive, gorgeous buildings with exquisite marble figures of celestial controllers are not enough. These often come at the expense of spirituality and help religious commerce only.

The eight steps of meditation based on Patanjali's YogaSutras (PYS 2.29) are: (1) Moral conduct, (2) Spiritual discipline, (3) Right posture and yogic exercises, (4) Yogic breathing, (5) Sense withdrawal, (6) Concentration, (7) Meditation, and (8) Trance or superconscious state of mind.

One must follow these eight steps, one by one, under proper guidance to make progress in meditation. Use of breathing and concentration techniques without necessary purification of the mind and without sublimation of feelings and desires by moral conduct and spiritual discipline (See 16.24) may lead to a dangerous, neurotic state of mind. Patanjali says: The sitting posture for meditation should be stable, relaxed, and comfortable for the individual's physical body (PYS 2.46).

Yogic breathing is not the forcible — and often harmful — retention of breath in the lungs as is commonly misunderstood and wrongly practiced. Patanjali defines it as control of the Prana — the bioimpulses or the astral life forces — that cause the breathing process (PYS 2.49). It is a gradual process of bringing under control or slowing down — by using standard yogic techniques, such as yogic postures, breathing exercises, locks, and gestures — the bioimpulses that activate the motor and sensory nerves that regulate breathing, and over which we normally have no control.

When the body is supercharged by the huge reservoir of omnipresent cosmic current flowing through the medulla oblongata, the need for breathing is reduced or eliminated and the yogi reaches the breathless state of trance, the last milestone of the spiritual journey. The Upanishad says: No mortal ever lives by breathing oxygen in the air alone. Mortals depend on something else (KaU 5.05). Jesus said: One shall not live by bread (food, water, and air) alone, but by every word (or the cosmic energy) that comes out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4.04). The cord of breath ties the living entity

(soul) to the body-mind complex. A yogi unties the soul from the body and ties it with the Supersoul during the breathless state of trance.

The withdrawal of the senses from the sense-objects is a major obstacle in the attainment of the goal of a yogi. When sense withdrawal has been accomplished, concentration, meditation, and Samadhi become very easy to master. The mind should be controlled and trained to follow the intellect rather than let it be drawn towards and controlled by gross sense objects, such as hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. The mind is restless by nature. Watching the natural flow of breath coming in and going out, and alternate breathing help to make the mind steady.

The two most common techniques of sense withdrawal are these: (1) Focus your full attention on the point between the eyebrows. Perceive and expand a sphere of white, rotating light there, (2) Mentally chant a mantra or any holy name of the Lord as quickly as possible for a long time and let the mind get completely absorbed into the sound of mental chanting until you do not hear the ticking sound of a nearby clock. The speed and loudness of mental chanting should be increased with the restlessness of the mind, and vice versa.

Concentration on a particular part of a deity, on the sound of a mantra, on the flow of breath, on various energy centers in the body, on the mid-brows, on the tip of the nose, or on an imaginary crimson lotus inside the chest center, stills the mind and stops it from wandering.

One should sit on his or her own firm seat that is neither too high nor too low, covered with grass, a deerskin, and a cloth, one over the other, in a clean spot. Sitting there in a comfortable position and concentrating the mind on God, controlling the thoughts and the activities of the senses, one should practice meditation to purify the mind and senses. (6.11-12)

A yogi should contemplate any beautiful form of God until the form becomes ever present in the mind. Short meditation with full concentration is better than long meditation without concentration. Fixing the mind on a single object of contemplation for twelve (12) seconds, two and one-half (2.5) minutes, and half an hour is known as concentration, meditation, and trance, respectively. Meditation and trance are the spontaneous result of concentration. Meditation occurs when the mind stops oscillating off the point of concentration.

In the lower stage of trance, the mind becomes so centered on a particular part of the deity — such as the face or the feet — that it forgets everything. This is like a dream in a wakeful state where one remains aware of one's mind, thoughts, and the surroundings. In the higher

stage of trance, the body becomes still and motionless, and the mind experiences various aspects of the Truth. The mind loses its individual identity and becomes one with the cosmic mind.

The superconscious state of mind is the highest stage of trance. In this state of mind, the normal human consciousness becomes connected to (or overpowered by) cosmic consciousness; one reaches a thoughtless, pulseless, and breathless state and does not feel anything except peace, joy, and supreme bliss. In the highest state of trance, the energy center (Chakra) on the top of the head opens up; the mind is merged into the infinite; and there is no mind or thought, but only the feeling of His transcendental existence, awareness, and bliss. A person who reaches this state is called a sage.

Attaining the blissful state of trance seems difficult for most people. Muniji gives a simple method. He says: When you are immersed in Him and His work is flowing through you, you become ever happy, ever joyful, and ever blissful.

One should sit by holding the waist, spine, chest, neck, and head erect, motionless and steady; fix the eyes and the mind steadily on the front of the nostril without looking around; make your mind serene and fearless; practice celibacy; have the mind under control; think of Me, and have Me as the supreme goal. (See also 4.29, 5.27, 8.10, and 8.12) (6.13-14)

Swami Hariharananda suggests keeping pinpointed attention penetrating four inches deep between the eyebrows near the master gland — the pituitary. The Bible says: If your eyes are single, your whole body will (seem to) be full of light (Matthew 6.22). Fixing the gaze on the nose tip is one of the gestures of KriyaYoga recommended by Swami Sivananda to awaken the Kundalini power located at the base of the spine. After a little practice each day, the eyes will become accustomed and slightly convergent and see the two sides of the nose. As you gaze at the nose tip, concentrate on the movement of breath through the nostrils. After ten minutes, close your eyes and look into the dark space in front of your closed eyes. If you see a light, concentrate on it because this light can completely absorb your consciousness and lead you to trance according to yogic scriptures. The beginner should first practice fixing the gaze at the mid-brows, as mentioned in verse 5.27, or at the chest center, as hinted in verse 8.12, before learning to fix the gaze on the tip of the nose. The help of a teacher and use of a mantra is highly recommended.

Celibacy is necessary to still the mind and awaken the dormant Kundalini. Celibacy and certain

breathing exercises are necessary to cleanse the subtle body. The subtle body is nourished by seminal and ovarian energy, just as the gross body needs food for nourishment. Sarada Ma warned her disciples not to be intimate with persons of the opposite gender even if God came in that form. The role of celibacy in spiritual life is overlooked in the West because it is not an easy task for most people. The individual should choose the right life partner for success in the spiritual journey if the practice of celibacy is not possible. It is very dangerous to force celibacy on disciples. The scripture says: Just as a King, protected by the castle walls, wins over the invincible enemy, similarly those who want victory over the mind and senses should try to subdue them by living as a householder (BP 5.01.18).

Sublimation of the sex impulse precedes enlightenment (AV 11.05.05). One sense organ, attached to its object, can drain the intellect, just as one hole in a water pot can empty the water (MS 2.99). One commits sin by engaging senses to sense objects and obtains yogic powers by controlling the senses (MS 2.93). Transmutation of the life force of procreative energy leads to yoga. One can transcend sex by beholding the presence of the divine in the body of all human beings and mentally bowing down to them.

Thus, by always practicing to keep the mind fixed on Me, the yogi whose mind is subdued attains peace of Nirvana and comes to Me. (6.15)

This yoga is not possible, O Arjuna, for one who eats too much or who does not eat at all, who sleeps too much or too little. (6.16)

The yoga of meditation destroys all sorrow for the one who is moderate in eating, recreation, working, sleeping, and waking. (6.17)

The Gita teaches that extremes should be avoided at all costs in all spheres of life. This moderation of the Gita was eulogized by Lord Buddha who called it the middle path, the right way, or the noble path. A healthy mind and body are required for successful performance of any spiritual practice. Therefore, it is required that a yogi should regulate his daily bodily functions, such as eating, sleeping, bathing, resting and recreation. Those who eat too much or too little may become sick or fragile. It is recommended to fill half of the stomach with food, one fourth with water, and leave the rest empty for air. If one sleeps more than six hours, one's lethargy, passion, and bile may increase. A yogi should avoid extreme indulgence in uncontrolled desires as well as the opposite extreme of yogic discipline — the torturing of the body and mind.

A person is said to have achieved yoga, union with the Self, when the perfectly disciplined mind becomes free from all desires and gets completely united with the Self in trance. (6.18)

The lamp (of mind) in a spot sheltered (by wall of the Self) from the wind (of desire) does not flicker. This simile is used for the subdued mind of a yogi absorbed in meditation on the Self. (6.19)

The sign of yogic perfection is that the mind remains always undisturbed like the flame of a lamp in a windless place.

When the mind, disciplined by the practice of meditation, becomes steady and quiet, one becomes content with the Self by beholding the Self with purified intellect. (6.20)

The self is present in all living beings as fire is present in wood. Friction makes the presence of fire in the wood visible to the eyes, similarly meditation makes the Self, residing in the body, perceivable (MB 12.210.42). A psychophysical transformation (or the superconscious state) of mind in trance is necessary for God-realization. Each of us has access to the superconscious mind that is not limited by time and space.

One cannot comprehend the Infinite by reason. Reason is powerless to grasp the nature of the beginningless Absolute. The highest faculty is not reasoning but intuition, the comprehension of knowledge coming from the Self and not from the fallible senses or reasoning. Self can be perceived only by the intuitive experience in the highest state of trance and by no other means. Yogananda said: Meditation can enlarge the magic cup of intuition to hold the ocean of infinite wisdom.

One feels infinite bliss that is perceivable only through the intellect, and is beyond reach of the senses. After realizing the Absolute Reality, one is never separated from it. (6.21)

After Self-realization (SR), one does not regard any other gain superior to SR. Established in SR, one is not moved even by the greatest calamity. (6.22)

The state of severance from union with sorrow is called yoga. This yoga should be practiced with firm determination, and without any mental reservation. (6.23)

Yoga is attained after long, constant, vigorous practice of meditation with firm faith (PYS 1.14).

One gradually attains tranquility of mind by totally abandoning all selfish desires, completely restraining the senses by the intellect, and keeping the mind fully absorbed in the Self by means of a well-trained and purified intellect and thinking of nothing else. (6.24-25)

When the mind is freed with the help of spiritual practices from the impurities of lust and greed born out of the feeling of 'I, me, and my', it remains tranquil in material happiness and distress (BP 3.25.16).

Wherever this restless and unsteady mind wanders during meditation, one should just witness it under the watchful eye (or supervision and control) of the Self. (6.26)

The mind plays tricks to wander and roam in the world of sensuality. The meditator should keep the mind fixed on the Self by always pondering that one is the soul, not the body. Just watch and laugh at the wanderings of the mind and gently bring it back to the supervision of the Self.

The natural tendency of the mind is to wander. We know from personal experience that the mind is very difficult to control. To control the mind is an impossible task like controlling the wind. The human mind can be subdued by any sincere spiritual practice such as meditation and detachment (Gita 6.34-35). Most commentators, however, have stated that the mind or self should be brought back under the supervision of the Self when it starts to wander during meditation.

Atma is considered superior to the body, senses, mind, and the intellect. (Gita 3.42). Thus we can use the awareness of the Atma to subdue the mind. Swami Vishvas has developed a meditation technique based on a slightly different meaning, given above, of verse 6.26. This Method of meditation, based on the theory: Never let the mind wander unsupervised, is described below:

Assume the meditative posture given in verse 6.13. It is a very good practice, before starting any work, to invoke the grace of the personal god of your choice that you believe in. Lord Ganesha and the Guru should be also invoked by Hindus.

The main aim of meditation, or any spiritual practice, is to get oneself out of the outer world and its activities, start the journey within, and become an introvert. Always keep in mind that you are not the body nor the mind, but Self (Atma) that is separate and superior to the body-mind complex (BMC). Detach your Self from the BMC and make the Self a witness during meditation. Withdraw your mind from the outside world and fix your gaze at any one center of your choice (pituitary gland, the sixth Chakra, front of the nostrils, the heart center, or the naval center) where you feel most

comfortable. Witness the activities of the mind without becoming judgmental — good or bad — about the thoughts coming to your mind. Just relax, take a joy ride in the back seat of the vehicle of mind, and watch the wanderings of mind in the thought-world. The mind will wander because this is its nature. It will not remain quiet in the beginning. Do not be in a hurry to slow down, pressure, control, or try to engage the mind in any other way, such as by chanting a mantra, concentrating on any object or thought.

Detach yourself completely from your mind and watch the play of Maya, the mind. Do not forget that your job is to see your (lower) self, the mind, with the (higher) Self, the Atma. Do not get attached or carried away by the thought waves (Vritti) of the mind; just witness or follow it. After serious and sincere practice, the mind will start slowing down when it finds out that it is being constantly watched and followed. Do not add anything to the process of witnessing the inner world of thought process (Chitta-vritti). Slowly, your power of concentration will increase; the mind will join the inward journey as a friend (Gita 6.05-06); and a state of bliss will radiate all around you. You will go beyond thought to the thoughtless world of Nirvikalp Samadhi. Practice this for half an hour in the morning and evening or at any other convenient, but fixed, time of your choice. The progress will depend on several factors beyond your control, but just persist without procrastination. Always conclude the meditation process with the triple sound vibration of Aum, and thank God.

WHO IS A YOGI

Supreme bliss comes to a Self-realized yogi whose mind is tranquil, whose desires are under control, and who is free from faults or sin. (6.27)

Such a sinless yogi, who constantly engages his or her mind and intellect with the Self, enjoys the eternal bliss of contact with the Self. (6.28)

Yogananda said: In the absence of inward joy, people turn to evil. Meditation on the God of bliss permeates us with goodness.

A yogi who is in union with the Supreme Being sees every being with an equal eye because of perceiving the omnipresent Supreme Being (or the Self) abiding in all beings and all beings abiding in the Supreme Being. (See also 4.35, 5.18) (6.29)

Perception of oneness of the Self in every being is the highest spiritual perfection. Sage Yajnavalkya said: A wife does not love her husband because of his or her physical satisfaction. She loves her husband because she

feels the oneness of her soul with his soul. She is merged in her husband and becomes one with him (BrU 2.04.05). The foundation of Vedic marriage is based on this noble and solid rock of soul culture and is unbreakable. Trying to develop any meaningful human relationship without a firm understanding of the spiritual basis of all relationships is like trying to water the leaves of a tree rather than the root.

When one perceives one's own higher Self in all people and all people in one's own higher Self, then one does not hate or injure anybody (IsU 06). Eternal peace belongs to those who perceive God existing within everybody as Spirit (KaU 5.13). One should love others, including the enemy, because all are your own self. "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you" is not only one of the noblest teachings of the Bible, but is an elementary idea common to all paths leading to God. When one realizes that his or her very self has become everything, whom shall one hate or punish? One does not break the teeth that bite the tongue. When one perceives none other than one's own Lord abiding in the entire universe, with whom shall one fight? One should not only love the roses, but love the thorns also.

One who sees One in all and all in One, sees the One everywhere. To fully understand this and to experience the oneness of individual soul and the Supersoul, is the highest achievement and the only goal of human birth (BP 6.16.63). In the fullness of one's spiritual development, one finds that the Lord, who resides in one's own heart, resides in the hearts of all others — the rich, the poor, the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the persecuted, the persecutor, the saint, and the sinner. Therefore, to hate a single person is to hate Him. This realization makes one a truly humble saint. One who realizes that the Supersoul is all-pervading and is none other than one's own individual self, bereft of all impurities collected over various incarnations, attains immortality and bliss.

Those who perceive Me in everything, and behold everything in Me, are not separated from Me, and I am not separated from them. (6.30)

A Self-realized person sees Me in the entire universe and in oneself and sees the entire universe and oneself in Me. When one sees Me pervading everything, just as fire pervades wood, one is at once freed from delusion. One attains salvation when one sees oneself different from body, mind, and the modes of material Nature and non-different from Me (BP 3.09.31-33). The wise see their own higher Self present in the entire universe and the entire universe present in their own higher Self. True devotees never fear any condition of life, such as reincarnation, living in heaven or in hell,

because they see God everywhere (BP 6.17.28). If you want to see, remember, and be with God at all times, then you must practice and learn to see God in everything and everywhere.

The non-dualists, who adore Me abiding in all beings, abide in Me irrespective of their mode of living. (6.31)

The best yogi is one who regards every being like oneself and who can feel the pain and pleasures of others as one's own, O Arjuna. (6.32)

One should consider all creatures as one's own children (BP 7.14.09). This is one of the qualities of a true devotee. The sages consider all women their mother, other's wealth a clod, and all beings as their own self. Rare is a person whose heart melts by the fire of grief of others and who rejoices hearing the praise of others.

TWO METHODS TO SUBDUE THE RESTLESS MIND

Arjuna said: O Krishna, You have said that the yoga of meditation is characterized by equanimity of mind, but due to restlessness of mind I do not perceive it as steady. Because the mind, indeed, is very unsteady, turbulent, powerful, and obstinate, O Krishna. I think restraining the mind is as difficult as restraining the wind. (6.33-34)

Lord Krishna said: Undoubtedly, O Arjuna, the mind is restless and difficult to restrain, but it is subdued by any constant vigorous spiritual practice — such as meditation — with perseverance, and by detachment, O Arjuna. (6.35)

Detachment is proportional to one's understanding of the baselessness of the world and its objects (MB 12.174.04). Contemplation without detachment is like jewels on the body without clothes (TR 2.177.02).

Yoga is difficult for one whose mind is not subdued. However, yoga is attainable by the person of subdued mind who strives through proper means. (6.36)

DESTINATION OF UNSUCCESSFUL YOGI

Arjuna said: What is the destination of the faithful who deviate from the path of meditation and fail to attain yogic perfection due to an unsubdued mind, O Krishna? (6.37)

Do they not perish like a dispersing cloud, O Krishna, having lost both the heavenly and the worldly pleasures, supportless and bewildered on the path of Self-realization? (6.38)

O Krishna, only You are able to completely dispel this doubt of mine because there is none other than You who can dispel such a doubt. (See also 15.15) (6.39)

Arjuna asked a very good question. Because the mind is very difficult to control, it may not be possible to achieve perfection during one's lifetime. Does all the effort get wasted? The answer comes:

Lord Krishna said: Spiritual practice performed by a yogi never goes to waste either here or hereafter. A transcendentalist is never put to grief, My dear friend. (6.40)

The less evolved unsuccessful yogi is reborn in the house of the pious and prosperous after attaining heaven and living there for many years. The highly evolved unsuccessful yogi does not go to heaven, but is born in a spiritually advanced family. A birth like this is very difficult, indeed, to obtain in this world. (6.41-42)

The unsuccessful yogi regains the knowledge acquired in the previous life and strives again to achieve perfection, O Arjuna. (6.43)

The unsuccessful yogi is instinctively carried towards God by virtue of the impressions of yogic practices of previous lives. Even the inquirer of yoga — union with God — surpasses those who perform Vedic rituals. (6.44)

The yogi who diligently strives becomes completely free from all imperfections after becoming gradually perfect through many incarnations and reaches the Supreme Abode. (6.45)

One must be very careful in spiritual life, or there is a possibility of being carried away by the powerful wind of bad association created by Maya, and one may abandon the spiritual path. One should never get discouraged. The unsuccessful yogi gets another chance by starting over from where he or she leaves off. The spiritual journey is long and slow, but no sincere effort is ever wasted. Normally it takes many, many births to reach the perfection of salvation. All living entities (souls) are eventually redeemed after they reach the zenith of spiritual evolution.

WHO IS THE BEST YOGI

The yogi is superior to the ascetics. The yogi is superior to the Vedic scholars. The yogi is superior to the ritualists. Therefore, O Arjuna, be a yogi. (6.46)

And I consider the yogi-devotee — who lovingly contemplates Me with supreme faith and whose mind is ever absorbed in Me — to be the best of all the yogis. (See also 12.02 and 18.66) (6.47)

Meditation or any other act becomes more powerful and efficient if it is done with knowledge, faith, and devotion to God. Meditation is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition for spiritual progress. The mind should be kept ever absorbed in thoughts of God. The meditative mood is to be continued during other times through scriptural study, Self-analysis, and selfless service. It is said that no single yoga alone is complete without the presence of other yogas. Just as the right combination of all ingredients is essential for preparation of a good meal, similarly, selfless service, chanting of Lord's name, meditation, study of scriptures, contemplation, and devotional love are essential for reaching the supreme goal. Some seekers prefer just to stick to one path. They should try all other major paths and see if a combination is better for them or not. Any path can become the right path if one has completely surrendered to God. The person who meditates with deep devotional love of God is called a yogi-devotee and is considered to be the best of all yogis.

Before one can purify one's psyche by a mantra or meditation, one has to reach a level whereby one's system of consciousness becomes sensitive to a mantra. This means one's mundane desires must be first fulfilled — or satisfied — by detachment, and one has practiced the first four steps of Patanjali's YogaSutra. It is just like cleaning jewelry first before gold-plating it.

7. SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, listen how you shall know Me fully without any doubt, with your mind absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me and performing yogic practices. (7.01)

METAPHYSICAL KNOWLEDGE IS THE ULTIMATE KNOWLEDGE

I shall impart to you both the transcendental knowledge and the transcendental experience or a

vision, after knowing that nothing more remains to be known in this world. (7.02)

Those who have transcendental experience become perfect (RV 1.164.39). Everything becomes (as though) known when the Supreme Being is heard, reflected, meditated upon, seen, and known (BrU 4.05.06). The need to know all other things becomes irrelevant with the dawn of the knowledge of the Absolute, the Supreme Spirit. All articles made of gold become known after knowing gold. Similarly, after knowing the Supreme Being (ParaBrahma), all other manifestations of the Eternal Being (Brahma) become known. Yogi Chimanbhai says: One who knows Lord Krishna as the Supreme Being (ParaBrahma), is considered to have known all, but one who knows everything, but does not know Krishna, does not know anything. The intent of the above verse is that knowledge of all other subjects remains incomplete without one's understanding of who am I?

SEEKERS ARE VERY FEW

Scarcely one out of thousands of persons strives for perfection of Self-realization. Scarcely one among those successful strivers truly understands Me. (7.03)

Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22.14). Few are fortunate enough to obtain knowledge of, and devotion to, the Supreme Being.

DEFINITION OF SPIRIT AND MATTER

The mind, intellect, ego, ether, air, fire, water, and earth are the eightfold division of My material Nature. (See also 13.05) (7.04)

'Material Nature' is defined as the material cause or the material energy out of which everything is made. Material Nature is the original source of the material world, consisting of three modes of material Nature and eight basic elements out of which everything in the universe has evolved, according to Sankhya doctrine. Material Nature is one of the transformations of divine power (Maya) and is the material cause of creation of the entire universe. Matter is thus a part of Lord's illusory energy, Maya. Material Nature is also referred to as perishable, body, matter, Nature, Maya, field, creation, and manifest state. That which creates diversity as well as the diversity itself, and all that can be seen or known, including the universal mind, is called material Nature.

Material Nature or matter is My lower Nature. My other higher Nature is the Spirit or consciousness by which this entire universe is sustained, O Arjuna. (7.05)

Two types of material Nature are described in verses 7.04 and 7.05. The eightfold material Nature described in verse 7.04 is called lower energy or material energy. This is commonly known as material Nature or Prakriti. It creates the material world with the help of consciousness (Cetanā). The other higher Nature mentioned in verse 7.05 is also called higher energy or the spiritual energy (Purusha). This is derived from consciousness, Self, Spirit, or Spiritual Being. Spirit is immutable; and material Nature, born of Spirit, is mutable. Spirit observes, witnesses, enjoys as well as supervises material Nature.

The Supreme Spirit is the efficient cause of creation of the universe. The material Nature and Spirit are not two independent identities but the two aspects of the Supreme Spirit. The Supreme Spirit, Spirit, and material Nature are the same, yet different as the sun and its light and heat are the same as well as different.

The water and the fish that is born in and sustained by the water, are not one and the same. Similarly, the Spirit and the material Nature that is born out of Spirit, are not one and the same (MB 12.315.14). The spirit is also called soul when spirit enjoys the modes of material Nature by associating with the senses. The Spirit and soul are also different because Spirit sustains soul, but the wise perceive no difference between the two (BP 4.28.62).

Some of the terms — such as the Supreme Spirit, Spirit, material Nature, and soul — have different definitions in different doctrines and also take different meanings, depending on the context. In this rendering, the nonsectarian word 'God' stands for the one and only Lord of the universe — the Supreme Being — whom Hindus prefer to call by various personal names such as Rama, Krishna, Shiva, and Mother. Different terminology does confuse a reader who has to learn — preferably with the help of a teacher — full connotation, usage, and hierarchic relationships between these and various other expressions as one progresses on the path of spiritual journey.

SUPREME SPIRIT IS THE BASIS OF EVERYTHING

Know that all creatures have evolved from this twofold energy, and the Supreme Spirit is the source of the origin as well as the dissolution of the entire universe. (See also 13.26) (7.06)

There is nothing higher than Me, the Supreme Being, O Arjuna. Everything in the universe is strung on Me like different jewels are strung on the thread of a necklace. (7.07)

One and the same Spirit is present in cows, horses, human beings, birds, and all other living beings just as the same thread is present in the necklace made of diamond, gold, pearl, or wood (MB 12.206.02-03). The entire creation is permeated by Him (YV 32.08).

O Arjuna, I am the sapidity in the water, I am the radiance in the sun and the moon, the sacred syllable 'AUM' in all the Vedas, the sound in the ether, and potency in human beings. I am the sweet fragrance in the earth. I am the heat in the fire, the life in all living beings, and the austerity in the ascetics. (7.08-09)

O Arjuna, know Me to be the eternal seed of all creatures. I am the intelligence of the intelligent and the brilliance of the brilliant. (See also 9.18 and 10.39). I am the strength of the strong who are devoid of selfish attachment. I am the lust or Cupid in human beings that is devoid of sense gratification and is in accord with Dharma (for the sacred purpose of procreation after marriage), O Arjuna. (7.10-11)

Know that three modes of material Nature — goodness, passion, and ignorance — also emanate indirectly from Me. I am neither dependent on, nor affected by, the modes of material Nature; but the modes of material Nature are dependent on Me. (See also 9.04 and 9.05) (7.12)

Human beings get deluded by various aspects of these three modes of material Nature; therefore, they do not know Me, who am eternal and above these modes. (7.13)

HOW TO OVERCOME THE DELUSIVE DIVINE POWER (MAYA)

This divine power of Mine called Maya, consisting of three modes of Nature, is very difficult to overcome. Only those who surrender unto Me easily pierce the veil of Maya and know the Absolute Reality. (See also 14.26, 15.19, and 18.66) (7.14)

When one fully dedicates one's life to the Supreme power and depends on Him under all circumstances, just as a small child depends on its parents, then Lord personally takes charge of such a devotee. And when He takes charge of you, there is no need to be afraid of anything or to depend on anybody else for anything — spiritual or material — in life.

WHO SEEKS GOD?

The evil doers, the ignorant, the lowest persons who are attached to demonic nature and whose power of discrimination has been taken away by divine illusive power (Maya), do not worship or seek Me. (7.15)

Four types of virtuous ones worship or seek Me, O Arjuna. They are: the distressed, the seeker of Self-knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the enlightened one who has experienced the Supreme Being. (7.16)

Whatever a person does is the product of desire. Nobody can ever do anything without the desire for it (MS 2.04). Desires cannot be completely wiped out. One should transmute the lower forms of selfish desires. Desire for salvation is a higher or noble form of desire. Desire for devotional love of God is regarded as the highest and the purest form of all human desires. It is said that advanced devotees do not even desire salvation from God. They long for loving devotional service to God, life after life.

The lower desires of devotees who approach Him for fulfillment become like roasted seeds that cannot sprout and grow into a big tree of desire. What really matters is the deep concentration of mind on God through feelings of devotion, love, fear, or even for material gain (BP 10.22.26).

Among them the enlightened devotee, who is ever united with Me and whose devotion is single-minded, is the best because I am very dear to the enlightened and the enlightened is very dear to Me. (7.17)

Knowledge of God without devotion — the love of God — is a dry speculation, and devotion without knowledge of God is blind faith. The fruit of enlightenment grows on the tree of Self-knowledge only when the tree receives the water of pure devotion.

All these seekers are indeed noble, but I regard the enlightened devotee as My very Self because one who is steadfast becomes one with Me and abides in My supreme abode. (See also 9.29) (7.18)

After many births, the enlightened one resorts to Me by realizing that everything is, indeed, My manifestation. Such a great soul is very rare. (7.19)

All this is, of course, the Spirit because everything is born from, rests in, and merges into the Spirit (ChU 3.14.01). All this is Spirit. The Spirit is

everywhere. All this universe is, indeed, Spirit (MuU 2.02.11). The Bible says: You are gods (John 10.34). The Vedas and Upanishads declare: (1) Consciousness is Spirit (AiU 3.03 in Rigveda). (2) I am Spirit (BrU 1.04.10 in Yajurveda). (3) You are Spirit (ChU 6.08.07 in Samaveda). (4) The Spirit is also called Atma (or Brahman, Brahm, Brahma) (MaU 02 in Atharvaveda). That which is One has become all these (RV 8.58.02). The entire creation and every order of reality are nothing but another form of divinity.

The male musk deer, after a vain search for the cause of the scent of the musk, at last will have to find the musk in himself. After God-realization, one sees that it is the Spirit of God (or Consciousness) that has become the universe and all living beings. Everything is consciousness. Creation is like countless waves appearing in the ocean of consciousness by the wind of divine power (Maya). Everything, including the primordial divine energy called Maya, is nothing but part and parcel of the Absolute.

Persons whose discernment has been carried away by desires impelled by their Karmic impression, resort to celestial controllers and practice various religious rites for fulfillment of their material desires. (7.20)

WORSHIP OF DEITY IS ALSO WORSHIP OF GOD

Whosoever desires to worship whatever deity — using any name, form, and method — with faith, I make their faith steady in that very deity. Endowed with steady faith, they worship that deity and obtain their wishes through that deity. Those wishes are, indeed, granted by Me. (7.21-22)

The power in the deities comes from the Supreme Lord as the aroma in the wind comes from the flower (BP 6.04.34). God is the bestower of fruits of work (BS 3.02.38). God fulfills all desires of His worshippers (BP 4.13.34). One should not look down upon any method of seeking God because all worship is worship of the same God. He fulfills all sincere and beneficial prayers of a devotee if He is worshipped with faith and love. The wise realize that all names and forms are His, whereas the ignorant play the game of holy war in the name of religion to seek personal gain at the cost of others.

It is said that whatever deity a person may worship, all his or her obeisance and prayers reach the Supreme Being just as all water that falls as rain eventually reaches the ocean. Whatever name and form of divinity one adores is worship of the same Supreme Being, and one gets the reward of deity-worship

performed with faith. Desired results of worship are given indirectly by the Lord through one's favorite deity. Human beings live in the darkness of the prison cells of pairs of opposites. Deities are like icons or a medium that can open the window through which the Supreme may be perceived. However, the worship of deities without full understanding of the nature of the Supreme Being is considered to be in the mode of ignorance.

Such material gains of these less intelligent human beings are temporary. The worshipers of celestial controllers go to celestial controllers, but My devotees certainly come to Me. (7.23)

Those who worship deities or celestial controllers are under the mode of passion; and those who practice other, much lower grades of worship, such as the worship of evil spirits, ghosts, black magic, and Tantra — also known as idolatry — to get progeny, fame, or to destroy their enemies are under the mode of ignorance. Lord Krishna advises against such lower grades of worship and recommends worship of the one and only Supreme Lord, using any one name and form. The devotees of Krishna may sometimes worship Krishna in other forms also. In Mahabharata, Lord Krishna Himself advised Arjuna to worship a much gentler mother form of God, known as Mother Durga, just before the start of the war for victory. This is like a child going to ask something from Mother instead of Father. The Lord is actually both mother and father of all creatures.

GOD CAN BE SEEN IN ANY DESIRED FORM OF WORSHIP

The ignorant ones — unable to completely understand My immutable, incomparable, incomprehensible, and transcendental form and existence — believe that I, the Supreme Being, am formless and take forms or incarnate. I do not reveal Myself to the ignorant ones whose Self-knowledge is obscured by My divine power (Yoga Maya) and do not know My unborn, eternal, and transcendental form and personality (and consider Me formless). (See also 5.16) (7.24-25)

The Sanskrit word 'Avyakta' has been used in verses 2.25, 2.28, 7.24, 8.18, 8.20, 8.21, 9.04, 12.01, 12.03, 12.05, and 13.05. It takes different meanings according to the context. It is used in the sense of unmanifest, material Nature and also in the sense of Spirit. Supreme Being — the Absolute Consciousness — is higher than both unmanifest Nature and Spirit. 'Avyakta' does not mean formless; it means unmanifest or a transcendental form that is invisible to our physical eyes and cannot be comprehended by the human mind or described by words. Everything has a form. Nothing in the cosmos, including the Supreme Being, is formless.

Every form is His form. Supreme Being has a transcendental form and Supreme Personality. He is eternal, without any origin and end. The invisible Absolute is the basis of the visible world.

The meaning of verse 7.24 also seems to contradict the common belief that Lord incarnates, as mentioned in verses 4.06-08, and 9.11. It is said here that the Supreme Being is ever unmanifest, and, as such, He never becomes manifest. In a true sense, the Supreme Being or Absolute does not incarnate. He actually never leaves His Supreme Abode! It is the intellect of the Supreme Being that does the work of creation, maintenance, incarnation, and destruction by using His innumerable powers. The deep meaning of this verse may be understood if one seriously studies the peace invocation of Ishopanishad that states: "The invisible is the Infinite, the visible too is infinite. From the Infinite, the infinite universes manifest. The Infinite (Absolute) remains Infinite or unchanged, even though infinite universes come out of it." People do not know the transcendental and imperishable nature of God and wrongly think that God also incarnates like an ordinary person. He does not incarnate, but manifests using His own divine potencies.

The transcendental Being is beyond the human conception of form and formless. Those who consider God formless are as wrong as those who say God has a form. The argument whether God is formless or has a form has nothing to do with our worship and spiritual practice. We can worship Him in any way or form that suits us. A name, form, and description of the imperceptible, all pervasive, and indescribable Lord has been given by saints and sages for cultivating the love of God in the hearts of common devotees. A name and a form are absolutely necessary for the purpose of worship and to nurture devotion — a deep love for God. God appears to a devotee in a form in order to make his or her faith firm. Therefore, it is necessary that one should respect all forms of God (or deity), but establish relationship with and worship one form only.

I know, O Arjuna, the beings of the past, of the present, and those of the future, but no one really knows Me. (7.26)

All beings in this world are in utter ignorance due to the delusion of pairs of opposites born of likes and dislikes, O Arjuna. But the persons purified by unselfish deeds, whose Karma has come to an end, become free from the delusion of pairs of opposites and worship Me with firm resolve. (7.27-28)

When the Karma of a person comes to an end, only then one can understand the transcendental science and develop love and devotion to God.

Those who strive for freedom from the cycles of birth, old age, and death — by taking refuge in Me — fully comprehend Brahman (or Brahma, Spirit, Eternal Being, Eternal Brahm) and the true nature and creative powers of Brahman. (7.29)

The steadfast persons who know Me alone as the basis of all — mortal beings, Divine Beings, and the Eternal Being — even at the time of death, attain Me. (See also 8.04) (7.30)

Those who know God to be the governing principle of the whole creation and the underlying basis of all, are blessed.

8. THE ETERNAL BRAHMA

Arjuna said: O Krishna, who is the Eternal Being or the Spirit? What is the nature of the Eternal Being? What is Karma? Who are the mortal beings? And who are Divine Beings? Who is the all pervading, Supreme Being and how does He dwell in the body? How can You, the Supreme Being, be remembered at the time of death by those who have control over their minds, O Krishna? (8.01-02)

DEFINITION OF SUPREME SPIRIT, SPIRIT, INDIVIDUAL SOUL, AND KARMA

Lord Krishna said: The eternal and immutable Spirit of the Supreme Being is called Eternal Being or the Spirit. The inherent powers of consciousness and expansion of Eternal Being are called the nature of Eternal Being. The creative power of Eternal Being that causes manifestation of the living entity is called Karma. (8.03)

Spirit is also called Eternal Spirit, Spiritual Being, Eternal Being, and God in English; and Brahm, or Eternal Brahm (Note: Brahm is also spelled as: Brahma, Brahman) in Sanskrit. Spirit is the cause of all causes. The word 'God' is generally used for both Spirit, and the Supreme Spirit (or the Supreme Being), the basis of Spirit. We have used the word 'Eternal Being' for Spirit; and 'Supreme Being', 'Absolute', and 'Krishna' for the Supreme Spirit in this rendering.

The subtle body consists of six sensory faculties, intellect, ego, and five vital forces called bioimpulses (Life forces, Prana). The individual soul (Jiva) is defined as the subtle body sustained by Spirit. The individual soul is enshrined in the physical body. The subtle body

keeps the physical body active and alive by operating the organs of perception and action.

Mortal beings, made up of the five basic elements, are changeable or temporal. Various expansions of the Supreme Being are called Divine Beings. I reside inside the physical bodies as the Divine Controller (Ishvara), O Arjuna. (8.04)

THEORY OF REINCARNATION AND KARMA

One who remembers Me exclusively, even while leaving the body at the time of death, attains the Supreme Abode; there is no doubt about it. (8.05)

Whatever object one remembers as one leaves the body at the end of life, that object is attained. Thought of whatever object prevails during one's lifetime, one remembers only that object at the end of life and achieves it. (8.06)

One's destiny is determined by the predominant thought at the time of death. Even if one has practiced devotion and God-consciousness during one's lifetime, the thought of God may or may not come at the hour of death. Therefore, God-consciousness should be continued till death (BS 1.1.12). Sages continue their efforts in their successive lives, yet at the moment of death they may fail to remember God. One cannot expect to have good thoughts at the time of death if one has kept bad company. Keep the association of perfect devotees and avoid the company of worldly-minded people for success in spiritual life. Whatever thought one nurtures during life, the same thought comes at the time of death and determines one's future destiny. Therefore, life should be molded in such a way that one should be able to remember God at the time of death. People should practice God-consciousness in everyday life from very childhood by forming a habit of remembering God before taking any food, before going to bed, and before starting any work or study.

A SIMPLE METHOD OF GOD REALIZATION

Therefore, always remember Me and do your duty. You shall certainly attain Me if your mind and intellect are ever focused on Me. (8.07)

The supreme purpose of life is to always remember a personal God one believes in; so that one can remember God at the time of death. To remember the absolute and impersonal God may not be possible for most human beings. A pure devotee is able to experience the ecstasy of Lord's personal presence within and reach His Supreme Abode by always remembering Him. Live in a state of constant spiritual awareness.

By contemplating Me with an unwavering mind that is disciplined by the practice of meditation, one attains the Supreme Being, O Arjuna. (8.08)

One gets spiritual awakening and the vision of God by constantly thinking of God in meditation, silent repetition of the holy names of God, and contemplation. The endeavor of our whole life shapes our destiny. Spiritual practices are meant to keep the mind absorbed in His thoughts and fixed at His lotus feet. Ramakrishna said that when you desire anything, pray to the Mother aspect of God in a lonely place, with tears of sincerity in your eyes, and your wishes shall be fulfilled. He also said that it might be possible to attain Self-realization within three days. The more intensely one practices spiritual disciplines, the more quickly one attains perfection. The intensity of conviction and belief, combined with deep yearning, restlessness, intense longing, and persistence, determine the speed of spiritual progress. The real practice of HathaYoga is not only the yogic exercises taught in modern yoga centers, but also the consistence, persistence, and insistence in one's search for the Supreme Truth.

Self-realization is not a simple act but a process of gradual spiritual growth, starting with resolve, proceeding gradually to vow, divine grace, faith, and finally realization of Truth (YV 19.30). The Supreme Being is not realized through discourses, intellect, or learning. It is realized only when one sincerely longs for it with vigorous effort. Sincere craving brings divine grace that unveils the Supreme Being (MuU 3.02.03).

One who meditates at the time of death with steadfast mind and devotion on the Supreme Being as the omniscient, the oldest, the controller, smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest, the sustainer of everything, the inconceivable, self-luminous like the sun, and transcendental (or beyond the material reality) by making the flow of bioimpulses (life forces, Prana) rise up to the middle of the eye brows by the power of yogic practices and holding there, attains Me, the Supreme Being. (See also verses 4.29, 5.27, 6.13) (8.09-10)

Now I shall briefly explain the process to attain the Supreme Abode that the knowers of the Veda call immutable, into which the ascetics, freed from attachment, enter; and desiring which people lead a life of celibacy. (8.11)

ATTAIN SALVATION BY MEDITATING ON GOD AT THE TIME OF DEATH

When one leaves the physical body, by controlling all the senses, focusing the mind on God and the bioimpulses (Life forces, Prana) in the cerebrum, engaged in yogic practice, meditating on Me, and uttering AUM — the sacred monosyllable cosmic sound power of the Spirit — one attains the Supreme Abode. (8.12-13)

Scriptural knowledge has its place, but it is through direct realization that the inner core can be reached and the outer shell discarded. Meditation is the way to inner realization and should be learnt, personally, from a competent teacher. Realization of the true nature of mind leads to meditation.

A simple technique of meditation is described here: (1) Wash your face, eyes, hands, and feet and sit in a clean, quiet, dark place, using any comfortable posture, with head, neck, and spine straight and vertical. No music or incense during meditation is recommended. The time and place of meditation should be fixed. Follow the good principles of living by thoughts, words, and deeds. Some yogic exercises are necessary. Midnight, morning, and evening are the best times to meditate for 15 to 25 minutes every day. (2) Remember any name or form of the personal god you believe in and ask His or Her blessings. (3) Close your eyes, tilt head slightly upward, and take 5 to 10 very slow and deep breaths. (4) Fix your gaze, mind, and feelings inside the chest center, the seat of the causal heart, and breathe slowly. Mentally chant 'So' as you breathe in and 'Hum' as you breathe out. Think as if breath itself is making these sounds 'So' and 'Hum' (I am That Spirit). Mentally visualize the breath going in and coming out through the nostrils. Be alert, and feel the sensation created by the breath in the body as you watch the breath. Do not try to control or lead your breathing; just watch your natural breathing. (5) Direct the will towards the thought of merging yourself into the infinite space of the air you are breathing. If your mind wanders away from following the breaths, start from step (4). Be regular, and persist without procrastination.

The sound of 'OM' or 'AUM' is a combination of three primary sounds: A, U, and M. It is the source of all sounds one can utter. Therefore, it is the fittest sound symbol of Spirit. It is also the primeval impulse that moves our five nerve centers that control bodily functions. Yogananda calls 'AUM' the sound of the vibration of the cosmic motor. The Bible says: In the beginning was the word (OM, Amen, Allah) and the word was with God, and the word was God (John 1.01). This cosmic sound vibration is heard by yogis as a sound, or a mixture of sounds, of various frequencies.

The Omnic meditation, mentioned here by Lord Krishna, is a very powerful, sacred technique used by

saints and sages of all religions. Briefly, the Omnic method entails getting the mind permeated by a continuous, reverberating sound of AUM. When the mind gets absorbed in repeating this divine sound, the individual consciousness merges into the Cosmic Consciousness.

A simpler method of contemplation is given below by Lord Krishna for those who cannot follow the conventional path of meditation discussed above.

I am easily attainable, O Arjuna, by that ever steadfast devotee who always thinks of Me and whose mind does not go elsewhere. (8.14)

It is not an easy task to always remember God. One must have a basis to remember God all the time. This basis could be an intense love of God or a passion to serve Him through the service of humanity.

After attaining Me, the great souls do not incur rebirth in this miserable transitory world because they have attained the highest perfection. (8.15)

Human birth is full of suffering. Even the saints, sages, and God in human form cannot escape the sufferings of the human body and mind. One has to learn to endure and work towards salvation.

The dwellers of all the worlds — up to and including the world of the Creator (Brahmā) — are subject to the miseries of repeated birth and death. But after attaining Me, O Arjuna, one does not take birth again. (See also 9.25) (8.16)

THE CREATION IS CYCLIC

Those who know that the duration of creation lasts 4.32 billion years and that the duration of destruction also lasts 4.32 billion years, they are the knowers of the cycles of creation and destruction. (See also 9.07) (8.17)

All manifestations come out of the subtle body of Brahmā during the creative cycle, and they merge into the same during the destructive cycle. (see also 9.07, 15.18) (8.18)

Thus, one complete creative cycle lasts 8.64 billion solar years. This consists of one day and one night of Brahmā, the Creator. The duration of partial dissolution, during which all heavenly planets, the earth, and the lower planets are annihilated and rest within Brahmā, is 4.32 billion years and is called Brahmā's night. Complete dissolution takes place at the end of Brahmā's (or creative cycle's) full life-span of 100 solar years, or 8.64 billion years x 30 x 12 x 100 = just over 311.04 trillion solar years called one Kalpa (See also BP

12.04.01-43), according to Vedic astrology. At this time, the complete material creation, including the modes of material Nature, enters into one of the four main, partial manifestations of the Absolute (See also 15.18) — called Avyakta Brahma or Adi Prakriti, the source and sink of the total material energy — and is annihilated. During the complete dissolution, everything is said to take rest in the abdomen of Avyakta Akshar Brahma (See verse 15.16) until the beginning of the next cycle of creation. In the second manifestation, Lord's energies enter into all the universes to create and support diversities. And in the third manifestation, the Absolute is diffused as the all-pervading supersoul in the universes and remains present within the atoms and every cell of everything — visible or invisible.

The same multitude of beings comes into existence again and again at the arrival of the creative cycle and are annihilated, inevitably, at the arrival of the destructive cycle. (8.19)

According to the Vedas, creation is a beginningless and endless cycle, and there is no such thing as the first creation.

There is another eternal transcendental existence — higher than the changeable material Nature — called Eternal Being or Spirit that does not perish when all created beings perish. This is also called the Supreme Abode. Those who attain the Supreme Abode do not take birth again. (8.20-21)

TWO BASIC PATHS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE WORLD

This Supreme Abode, O Arjuna, is attainable by unswerving devotion to Me, within which all beings exist and by which the entire universe is pervaded. (See also 9.04 and 11.55) (8.22)

O Arjuna, now I shall describe different paths departing by which, after death, the yogis do or do not come back to the mortal or temporal world. (8.23)

Verses 8.23-26 are considered to be the most mysterious and misunderstood verses in the Gita. What appears to refer to the auspicious times of departure of the living entity during death in verses 8.24 and 8.25, actually refers to the presiding deities of various astral planes during gradual passage of the soul after death. This is made clear in verse 8.26. It should be noted that one's final destination and the corresponding path leading to the destination has to be earned and may have nothing to do, directly, with the time of death. Eligibility to tread the path, and not the time of departure, as is

sometimes commonly misunderstood, determines the path of departure.

Lord explains in verses 8.24-25 that there are two goals in life which people seek. These two goals are achieved by two different paths guiding the two types of seekers to their destinations. One is called the path of no return (verse 8.24), and the other is the path of return (verse 8.25). These two paths are renamed in verse 8.26 as the path of light and the path of darkness, the path of Moksha and path of coming and going, the path of the seekers of spirituality and seekers of materialism, path of the light of knowledge and of darkness of ignorance.

Passing gradually after death, through celestial controllers of fire, light, daytime, the bright lunar fortnight, and the six months of the northern solstice of the sun, yogis who know the Self attain supreme abode (and do not come back to earth). (8.24)

The path of no return, described above, is also called the path of gods (Devayāna), the path of light of Self-knowledge, the northern path, and the path of gradual liberation (Krama-mukti), the ascending path of evolution. This path is blocked for the ignorant and persons devoid of the necessary qualities such as austerity, abstinence, faith and knowledge. Those who have above mentioned qualities will walk this path. It is also said that this path is closed during the six months of southern solstice of the sun as mentioned in verse 8.25.

Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight and the six months of the northern solstice of the sun indicate deities presided over by the Sun. It is said in the Upanishads (ChU 4.15.05, BrU 6.2.15) that those who qualify for the northern path after death reach the celestial ruler of flame, from there to the celestial ruler of the day, from there to the celestial ruler of the bright fortnight, from there to the celestial ruler of the six months during which the sun travels northwards, from there to Sun, and from there to lightening. Then a Superbeing, created from the mind of Brahmā, comes and leads them to the world of Brahmā. Becoming perfect at each stage, they stay in the world of Brahmā till the end of the cycle of creation; at the completion of which they merge in Brahman together with Brahmā. Having reached Brahman, they do not return back to worldly life again. This is also called Brahm-Nirvana.

Passing gradually after death, through celestial controllers of smoke, night, the dark lunar fortnight, and the six months of southern solstice of the sun, the righteous person attains heaven and comes back to earth again. (8.25)

The destination of righteous persons, who work to enjoy the fruits of their labor, is described in the above

verse. Those who leave the world after spending their lifetime in doing good and performing rituals and worship to enjoy the results so accrued, travel by the southern path. This path is also called the path of darkness of ignorance, the path of return, the path of ignorance, the path of ancestors, and the path of materialism. This path is presided over by the Moon god, representing the world of matter and sense enjoyment. Those who qualify for this path, after death, reach the celestial ruler of smoke, from there to the celestial ruler of the night, from there to the celestial ruler of the dark fortnight, from there to the celestial ruler of the six months during which the sun travels southwards, and from there to heaven. Such yogis return to the mortal world, after enjoying heavenly pleasures for a period of time, when the fruits of their virtuous deeds are exhausted.

The path of light of spiritual practice and Self-knowledge and the path of darkness of materialism and ignorance are thought to be the world's two eternal paths. The former leads to salvation, and the latter leads to rebirth as human beings. (8.26)

The path of transmigration may be included in the path of reincarnation, or it may be called the third path. The Upanishads describe this third path as the path of lower creatures, such as animals and insects. Unrighteous ones, who do not qualify for the two paths mentioned in verses 8.24 and 8.25, transmigrate into lower wombs, such as animals, birds, and insects (BrU 6.02.15-16). The immortal soul wanders endlessly through the ocean of transmigration, made up of 8.4 million different species of life on this planet. The good Lord, out of His sweet will or mercy and without any reason, bestows the precious gift of the human body that is like a raft to carry one across the ocean of transmigration (TR 7.43.02-04). Consider what we are is God's gift to us, and what we become is our gift to God. It is also said that human birth, faith in God, and the help of a real guru come only by His grace. Our present life provides the opportunity for preparation for the next life. According to the activities in this life, one can either get a promotion or salvation, a demotion or transmigration, or another chance for salvation by reincarnating as a human being.

To whatever object one's mind is set, to that goes one's subtle and causal bodies with Karma attached to it. Thus, a person who has no desire or whose desires have been satisfied or whose only object of desire is the Self, is merged in Brahman even in this very life. This is called Jeevan-Mukti or Nirvana.

KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO SALVATION

Knowing these two paths, O Arjuna, a yogi is not bewildered at all. Therefore, one should be resolute in attaining salvation — the goal of human birth — at all times. (8.27)

One who knows all this goes beyond getting the benefits of the study of the Vedas, performance of sacrifices, austerities, and charities; and attains salvation. (8.28)

9. SUPREME KNOWLEDGE AND THE BIG MYSTERY

Lord Krishna said: Since you have faith in My words, I shall reveal to you the most profound, secret, transcendental knowledge, together with transcendental experience. Knowing this, you will be freed from the miseries of worldly existence. (9.01)

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE OF THE SUPREME IS THE BIGGEST MYSTERY

This Self-knowledge is the king of all knowledge, is the most secret, is very sacred, can be perceived by instinct, conforms to righteousness (Dharma), is very easy to practice, and is timeless. (9.02)

O Arjuna, those who have no faith in this knowledge do not attain Me and follow the cycles of birth and death. (9.03)

Everything is possible for the person who has faith in God (Mark 9.23). Faith in the Supreme power holds the key to unlock the gates of salvation.

This entire universe is an expansion of, or pervaded by, My Avyakta Brahma aspect. All beings depend on Me (like a gold chain depends on gold and milk products depend on milk). I do not depend on — or become affected by — them because I am the highest of all. (See also 7.12, 15.18) (9.04)

From a dualistic viewpoint, waves depend on the ocean; the ocean does not depend on the waves. But from a monist point of view, as stated in verse 9.05 below, the question of wave abiding in the ocean or the ocean abiding in the wave does not arise because there is no wave or ocean. It is water only. Similarly, everything is a manifestation of the Spirit only (Gita 7.19).

Look at the power of My divine mystery; in reality, I — the sustainer and Creator of all beings — do not depend on them, and they also do not depend on Me. (9.05) *(In fact, the gold-chain does not depend on gold; the gold-chain is nothing but gold. Also, matter and energy are different, as well as non-different).*

The wave is water, but the water is not wave. The water has become the vapor, the cloud, the rain, the ice, as well as the bubble, the lake, the river, the wave, and the ocean. These are nothing but names of different forms (or transformations) of water. From a monist viewpoint, there is no ocean, no wave, and no lake, but water only. However, a wave is a wave as long as it does not realize its true nature — that it is not a wave but water. When the wave realizes that it is water, the wave no longer remains a wave, but becomes water. Similarly, when one realizes that he or she is not this physical body — but the Eternal Being in the form of Spirit residing inside the physical body — one transcends physical body and immediately becomes one with the Spirit without undergoing any physical change. As a physical body, one is mortal, limited by a form, with color, gender, and temperament. But as a part of the Spirit, one is free, immortal, and limitless. This is called Nirvana, or salvation.

Perceive that all beings remain in Me — without any contact or without producing any effect — as the mighty wind, moving everywhere, eternally remains in space. (9.06)

Gross objects, such as planets and stars, remain in the subtle space without any visible connection at all. Similarly, the entire universe, including space itself, abides in the unified field called Consciousness. Time has no access to space; similarly, Consciousness is everlasting, indivisible, and unaffected by everything going on in its field, just as clouds do not make the sky wet.

THEORY OF EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION

All beings merge into My primary material Nature at the end of a cycle of just over 311 trillion solar years, O Arjuna, and I create them again at the beginning of the next cycle. (See also 8.17) (9.07)

As a spider spreads out the web from within, plays in it, and again draws the web into itself, similarly, the Eternal Being (or Spirit) creates the material world from itself, plays in it as living entity, and takes it into itself during complete dissolution (BP 11.09.21 and 12.04.01-43). All manifestations are born, sustained, and finally merge in Spirit as bubbles of water are born, sustained, and merge in water. Spirit manifests itself into the universe by using its own internal power without the

help of any external agent. It is possible for one Spirit — by virtue of possessing diverse powers — to be transformed into multiplicity without any outside help. Spirit (or the Eternal Being) is thus both the efficient and the material cause of creation.

I create the entire multitude of beings again and again with the help of My material Nature. These beings are under control of the modes of material Nature. (9.08)

These acts of creation do not bind Me, O Arjuna, because I remain indifferent and unattached to those acts. (9.09)

The divine kinetic energy (Maya) — with the help of material Nature, Prakriti — creates all animate and inanimate objects under My supervision; thus, the creation keeps on going, O Arjuna. (See also 14.03) (9.10)

THE WAYS OF THE WISE AND OF THE IGNORANT ARE DIFFERENT

Ignorant persons despise Me when I appear in human form because they do not know My transcendental nature as the great Lord of all beings (and take Me for an ordinary human being), and because they have false hopes, false actions, false knowledge, and delusive (Tāmasika) qualities (See 16.04-18) of fiends and demons (they are unable to recognize Me). (9.11-12)

When Lord Krishna was here on this earth, in spite of accomplishing many transcendental and extraordinary feats, only a few people were able to recognize Him as an incarnation of the Supreme Being. Even a highly evolved soul, such as King Yudhishtira, was quite surprised to learn from sage Narada that his (King's) cousin brother, Krishna, is the Supreme Being in human form (BP 7.15.79). The moral is that the Supreme cannot be known without one's good Karma and His personal grace.

But great souls, O Arjuna, who possess divine qualities (See 16.01-03), know Me as immutable, as the material and efficient cause of creation, and worship Me single-mindedly with loving devotion. (9.13)

Persons of firm resolve worship Me with ever-steadfast devotion by always singing My glories, striving to attain Me, and prostrating before Me with devotion. (9.14)

Some worship Me by acquiring and propagating Self-knowledge. Others worship the infinite as one in all (or non-dual), as the master of all (or dual), and in various other ways. (9.15)

EVERYTHING IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE ABSOLUTE

I am the ritual, I am the sacrifice, I am the offering, I am the herb, I am the mantra, I am the clarified butter, I am the fire, and I am the oblation. (See also 4.24). I am the supporter of the universe, the father, the mother, and the grandfather. I am the object of knowledge, the sacred syllable 'AUM', and the Vedas. I am the goal, the supporter, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the foundation, the substratum, and the immutable seed. (See also 7.10 and 10.39) (9.16-18)

I give heat. I send, as well as withhold, the rain. I am immortality, as well as death. I am also both the eternal Absolute and the temporal, O Arjuna. (The Supreme Being has become everything. See also 13.12) (9.19)

ATTAIN SALVATION BY DEVOTIONAL LOVE

The doers of the rituals prescribed in the Vedas, the drinkers of the nectar of devotion, whose sins are cleansed, worship Me by doing good deeds for gaining heaven. As a result of their meritorious deeds, they go to heaven and enjoy celestial sense pleasures. (9.20)

They again return to the mortal world — after enjoying the wide world of heavenly pleasures — upon exhaustion of the fruits of their good Karma. Thus, following the injunctions of the Vedas, persons working for the fruit of their actions take repeated births and deaths. (See also 8.25) (9.21)

I personally take care of both the spiritual and material welfare of those ever-steadfast devotees who always remember and adore Me with single-minded contemplation. (9.22)

Wealth and happiness automatically come to the righteous person, without that person asking for it, as the river automatically goes to the ocean (TR 1.293.02). Material wealth naturally comes to the virtuous person as river water naturally flows downstream (VP 1.11.24). Lord Rama said: I always take care of those who worship Me with unswerving devotion as a mother takes care of her child (TR 3.42.03). The worship of the Mother form

of the Lord is encouraged for the seekers of health, wealth, and knowledge. One who always thinks of God is considered to be God-conscious, Krishna-conscious, or Self-realized. Lord personally takes charge of one who remembers Him single-mindedly. His nature is to reciprocate the love of His pure devotees by fulfilling their desires.

Father in the heaven knows all of what you need. Give first place to His Kingdom and what He requires. He will provide you everything (Matthew 6.32-33). Nothing is difficult to obtain when I am pleased, but a pure devotee whose mind is exclusively fixed upon Me does not ask anything, including salvation, but the opportunity to serve Me (BP 6.09.48). The Lord chooses much better things for you if you let Him be your guide by surrendering unto His will.

O Arjuna, even those devotees who worship the deities with faith, they also worship Me, but in an improper way. (9.23)

There is only one Absolute; the wise call Him and worship Him by various names (RV 1.164.46). The worship of the divine as Mother is also found in the Vedas where the sage longs to be a child of the divine Mother (RV 7.81.04). The Absolute has also manifested as celestial controllers — for sustaining creation — who are one with many names and forms (RV 3.55.01). The Supreme Being is a woman, a man, a boy, a girl, and an old person. He exists in all forms (AV 10.08.27). All deities, male or female, are representations of one divine. He is One in many and many in One. One should not worship material objects in creation, such as family, friends, and possessions; but one can worship the creator in material objects because God is in all rocks. The Vedic principle of celestial controllers does not diversify the Unity, but unifies the diversity. Deities are just different names and forms, or symbolic representations, of the energies of nature.

The deity is a conduit through which the water of divine grace can be made to flow by the power of conviction — expressed through worship and prayer — from the reservoir of infinite consciousness. However, the seedling of faith becomes the fruit tree of conviction only when it comes out of the ground of Self-knowledge and survives the frost of logic. We evoke the potential energy of cosmic forces by contemplating deities with faith. Faith really works. The power of faith in rituals or spiritual science works in the same manner as a placebo works by the power of faith in medical science. However, it is not very easy for intellectuals to develop a deep faith in the power of rituals. Joseph Campbell said: “The images of myth are reflections of the spiritual potentialities of everyone of us, and deities stimulate divine love.”

All different types of worship reach One and the same Lord as waters of all different rivers reach the same ocean. External worship with the help of an image or a symbolic representation of God is necessary for beginners. It is very helpful to develop a personal relationship with a deity of one's choice who can be consulted and counted upon for help during moments of crisis in life. Those who are against deity worship do not understand that all-pervading God can also exist within a deity. Such persons limit His supremacy.

The ancient Vedic scriptures have authorized the deity form of worship of God because it cleanses the heart, mind, and the subtle and gross senses of the worshiper, and increases as well as sustains one's faith in God.

The next step is the chanting of hymns and the repetition (Japa) of divine names. The next stage is meditation. The vision of Spirit-consciousness, or beholding the Spirit manifested through every individual, is the highest spiritual development.

Because I — the Supreme Being — alone am the enjoyer of all sacrificial services and Lord of the universe. But people do not know My true transcendental nature. Therefore, they fall into the repeated cycles of birth and death. (9.24)

Worshippers of the celestial controllers go to the celestial controllers; the worshippers of the ancestors go to the ancestors; and the worshippers of the ghosts go to the ghosts; but My devotees come to Me, and are not born again. (See also 8.16) (9.25)

It is said that whatever one worships, that destination one attains; or one becomes what one regularly thinks of.

LORD ACCEPTS AND EATS THE OFFERING OF LOVE AND DEVOTION

Whosoever offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water with devotion, I accept and eat the offering of devotion by the pure-hearted. (9.26)

The Lord is hungry for love and the feeling of devotion. A dedicated heart, not complicated rituals, is needed to please God and obtain His grace. One should consume food after offering it to God first. God eats the food offerings to please His devotees. The mind becomes purified when one eats food after offering it first to the Lord.

O Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation to the sacred fire, whatever charity you give, whatever austerity you

perform — dedicate everything as an offering to Me. (See also 12.10, 18.46) (9.27)

It is neither necessary, nor sufficient that one should follow a certain routine, ritualistic offering of worship everyday to please God. Whatever one does per one's nature by body, mind, senses, thought, intellect, action, and speech, should be done with the thought that it is all for God only (BP 11.02.36). People have achieved liberation by performing only one type of devotional service, such as chanting, hearing, remembering, serving, meditating, renouncing, and surrendering. The love for fame is a fire that can destroy all yoga and austerity. The illusory power of divine kinetic energy (Maya) is formidable. It betrays everyone, including the yogis, unless one does everything for God.

You shall become free from the bondage — good and bad — of Karma and come to Me by this attitude of complete dedication to Me. (9.28)

The Self is present equally in all beings. There is no one hateful or dear to Me. But those who worship Me with love and devotion are very close to Me, and I am also very close to them. (See also 7.18) (9.29)

Lord Krishna says here that one should not be partial, but should treat a faithful or a helpful person better than others. Lord is neither merciless nor partial to anyone. Lord loves no one and hates no one, but does give special preference to His devotees. He said: My devotees do not know anything else but Me, and I do not know anyone else but them (BP 9.4.68). To protect His devotee is His nature. Lord goes out of way to help and fulfill the desires of His sincere devotees. He also reciprocates by always thinking of those devotees who always think of Him and saves such devotees from all calamities and major problems. The best path of perfection — suitable to the individual's nature — is shown to His sincere devotees.

I am with the Father, and the Father is with Me (John 10.38 and 14.11). Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find (Matthew 7.07). God's grace is just for the asking. The doors of devotion are open to all, but the faithful and the dedicated ones who burn the incense of devotion in the temple of their heart become one with the Lord. A father loves all his children equally, but the child who is devoted to the father is more dear although he or she may not be very rich, intelligent, or powerful. Similarly, a devotee is very dear to the Lord. Lord does not give everything — such as both material and spiritual wealth — to everybody. One attains perfection — by the grace of God — through the practice of spiritual discipline. Both self-effort and grace are needed. According to the Vedas, the gods help only those who

help themselves (RV 4.33.11). Yogananda said: God chooses those who choose Him.

The grace of God, like rays of the sun, is equally available to all, but due to free will one must open the window of the heart to let the sunshine come in. It is said that divinity is our birthright; however, self-effort in the right direction is also necessary to remove hindrances brought about by our own past deeds. The grace of God also comes expeditiously through our own efforts. It is also believed that divine grace and self-effort are one and the same. Self-effort promotes the process of God-realization as manure promotes growth of plants.

THERE IS NO UNFORGIVABLE SINNER

If even the most sinful person resolves to worship Me with single-minded, loving devotion, such a person must be regarded as a saint because of making the right resolution. (9.30)

There are no unforgivable sins or sinners. The fire of sincere repentance burns all sins. The Koran says: Those who believe in Allah and do right action, He will forgive their evil deeds (Surah 64.09). Yogananda used to say: A saint is the sinner who never gave up. Every saint had a past, and every sinner has a future. The Bible says: Everyone who believes in Him shall have eternal life (John 3.15). Acts of austerity, service, and charity, done without any selfish motive, can atone for sinful acts, as darkness vanishes after sunrise (MB 3.207.57). If a devotee keeps his or her mind focused on God, there will be no room for sinful desires to mature, and a sinful person soon becomes righteous as mentioned below:

Such a person soon becomes righteous and attains everlasting peace. Be aware, O Arjuna, that My devotee never fails to reach the goal. (9.31)

PATH OF DEVOTIONAL LOVE IS EASIER

Anybody — including women, merchants, laborers, and the evil-minded — can attain the Supreme Abode by just surrendering unto My will with loving devotion, O Arjuna. (See also 18.66) (9.32)

A spiritual discipline should be commensurate with the faith, interest, and ability of the person. Some may be disqualified or not ready to receive the knowledge of the Supreme, but the path of devotion is open to all. No one is disqualified due to caste, creed, gender, or mental capacity to receive devotion. Most saints and sages consider the path of devotion the easiest and the best of all paths.

Then it should be very easy for the wise and devout sages to attain the Supreme Being. Therefore, having obtained this joyless and transitory human life, one should always worship Me with loving devotion. (9.33)

The living entity, under the spell of illusory power of divine kinetic energy (Maya), goes through the repeated cycles of birth and death. The good Lord, out of His grace, gives to a living entity a human body that is very difficult to obtain. The human body, created in the image of God, is the jewel of creation and has the capacity to deliver the soul from the net of transmigration to higher levels of existence. All other forms of life on the earth, except human life, are devoid of higher intellect and discrimination.

As a tiger suddenly comes and takes away a lamb from the flock, similarly, death takes away a person unexpectedly. Therefore, spiritual discipline and righteous deeds should be performed without waiting for a proper time to come (MB 12.175.13). The goal and obligation of human birth are to seek Him. The search for God should not wait. One should continue this search parallel with other duties of life; otherwise, it may be too late. Lord Krishna concludes this chapter by giving practical ways to engage people in His devotional service below:

Always think of Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, and bow down to Me. Thus, uniting yourself with Me by setting Me as the supreme goal and the sole refuge, you shall certainly come to Me. (9.34)

10. MANIFESTATION OF THE ABSOLUTE

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, listen once again to My supreme word that I shall speak to you, who are very dear to Me, for your welfare. (10.01)

GOD IS THE ORIGIN OF EVERYTHING

Neither the celestial controllers nor the great sages know My origin because I am the origin of celestial controllers and great sages also. (10.02)

One who knows Me as the unborn, the beginningless, and the Supreme Lord of the universe, is considered wise among mortals and becomes liberated from the bondage of Karma. (10.03)

Discrimination, Self-knowledge, non-delusion, forgiveness, truthfulness, control over the mind and senses, tranquility, pleasure, pain, birth,

death, fear, fearlessness, nonviolence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, ill fame — these diverse qualities in human beings arise from Me alone. (10.04-05)

If you forgive others, your Father in heaven will also forgive you (Matthew 6.14). Resist no evil with evil (Matthew 5.39). Love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you (Matthew 5.44). One should control anger toward the wrong-doer. The controlled anger itself punishes the wrong-doer if the wrong-doer does not ask forgiveness (MB 5.36.05). One who does wrong is destroyed by the same act of wrong doing if he or she does not ask forgiveness (MS 2.163). One who truly forgives trespassers is happy because the anger of the forgiver is exterminated. Progress in spiritual discipline is impeded if one's interpersonal relationship is full of hurt and negative feeling, even for a single living entity. Therefore, one must learn to forgive and to ask forgiveness.

Even virtue has its own vice. Forgiveness may often be construed as a sign of weakness; therefore, clemency is the strength of the strong and a virtue for the weak. A person should be forgiven if he or she has sincerely asked forgiveness, if it is the first offense, if the offense was not intentional, and if the offender has been helpful in the past. The tool of punishment may be used — without any feeling of revenge — to correct and teach intentional and repeated offenders.

The great saints, sages, and all the creatures of the world were born from My potential energy. (10.06)

One who truly understands My manifestations and yogic powers, is united with Me by unswerving devotion. There is no doubt about it. (10.07)

I am the origin of all. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who understand this adore Me with love and devotion. (10.08)

That which is One has become this all (RV 8.58.02).

My devotees remain ever content and delighted. Their minds remain absorbed in Me and their lives surrendered unto Me. They always enlighten each other by talking about Me. (10.09)

Devotees are the well wishers of everyone and help others to advance on the spiritual path.

LORD GIVES KNOWLEDGE TO HIS DEVOTEES

I give the powers of analysis and reasoning to understand the metaphysical science — to those

who are ever united with Me and lovingly adore Me — by which they come to Me. (10.10)

We are given powers of analysis and reasoning (Viveka) that can be used to understand the metaphysical science or Self-knowledge. Those who receive Him and believe in Him, He makes them come to the Father in heaven (John 1.12). Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein (Luke 18.17).

I, who dwell within their inner psyche as consciousness, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the shining lamp of transcendental knowledge as an act of compassion for them. (10.11)

All other forms of Krishna can be achieved by different means of worship, but Krishna Himself can be achieved only by devotion and exclusive love (Chimanbhai). The lamp of spiritual knowledge and God-realization can be easily ignited by the intense spark of devotion, but never by intellect and logic alone.

Arjuna said: You are the Supreme Being, the Supreme Abode, the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal Being, the primal God, the unborn, and the omnipresent. All saints and sages have thus acclaimed You, and now You Yourself are telling me that. (10.12-13)

NOBODY CAN KNOW THE REAL NATURE OF REALITY

O Krishna, I believe all that You have told me to be true. O Lord, neither the celestial controllers nor the demons fully understand Your real nature. (See also 4.06) (10.14)

O Creator and Lord of all beings, God of all celestial rulers, the Supreme person, and Lord of the universe, You alone know Yourself by Yourself. (10.15)

The Vedas left the final question of the origin of ultimate Reality unanswered by stating that nobody knows the ultimate source from where this creation has come. Sages went further by stating that perhaps even He does not know (RV 10.129.06-07). One who says that I know God does not know; one who knows the Truth says that I do not know. God is the unknown to a person of true knowledge; only the ignorant claim to know God (KeU 2.01-03). The ultimate source of cosmic energy is and will remain a big mystery. Any specific description of God, including a description of heaven and hell, is nothing but a mental speculation.

Therefore, You alone are able to fully describe Your own divine glories or the manifestations by which You exist pervading all the universes. (10.16)

How may I know You, O Lord, constantly contemplating on You? In what form of manifestation are You to be thought of by me, O Lord? (10.17)

O Lord, explain to me again, in detail, Your yogic power and glory because I am not satiated by hearing Your nectar-like words. (10.18)

EVERYTHING IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE ABSOLUTE

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, now I shall explain to you My prominent divine manifestations because My manifestations are endless. (10.19)

O Arjuna, I am the Supreme Spirit (or Supersoul) abiding in the inner psyche of all beings as soul (Atma). I am also the creator, maintainer, and destroyer — or the beginning, the middle, and the end — of all beings. (10.20)

Spirit has no origin and is a property of the Supreme Being, just as sunlight is a property of the sun (BS 2.03.17). The Supreme Being and Spirit are like sun and sunlight, different as well as non-different (BS 3.02.28). Within living beings, Spirit is the controller. Spirit is different from the physical body, just as fire is different from wood.

The senses, mind, and intellect cannot know Spirit or universal consciousness because the senses, mind, and intellect get their power to function from Spirit alone (KeU 1.06). Spirit supplies power and supports the senses, just as air burns and supports fire (MB 12.203.03). Spirit is the basis and support behind every form of power, movement, intellect, and life in this universe. It is the power by which one sees, hears, smells, thinks, loves, hates, and desires objects.

I am the sustainer. I am the radiant sun among the luminaries; I am the controller of wind; I am the moon among the stars. (10.21)

I am the Vedas. I am the celestial rulers. I am the mind among the senses; I am the consciousness in living beings. (10.22)

I am Lord Shiva. I am the god of wealth; I am the god of fire and the mountains. (10.23)

I am the priest and the army general of the celestial controllers, O Arjuna. I am the ocean among the bodies of water. (10.24)

I am the great sage, Bhṛigu. I am the monosyllable cosmic sound 'AUM' among words; I am the silent repetition of mantra (Japa) among the spiritual disciplines, and I am the Himalaya among the mountains. (10.25)

A constant chanting of a mantra or any holy name of God is considered by saints and sages of all religions to be the easiest and most powerful method of Self-realization in the present age. The practice of this spiritual discipline with faith will drive sound vibrations into the deeper layers of mind where it works like a damper in preventing the rise of waves of negative thoughts and ideas, leading the way to inner awakening in due course of time. Meditation is the extended and higher stage of this process. One must first practice this before going into transcendental meditation. Swami Harihar says: There should be no desire to gain any worldly objects in exchange for the repetition of the divine name. The spiritual force of the divine name should not be applied even for the destruction of sin. It should be resorted to for divine realization only.

The form of the Lord cannot be known nor comprehended by the human mind without a name. If one chants or meditates on the name without seeing the form, the form flashes on the screen of the mind as an object of love. A great saint said: Place the lamp of the name of the Lord near the door of your tongue if you want the light both inside and outside. The name of God is greater than both impersonal and personal aspects of God because the power of the name has control over both aspects of God. It is said that the best of all spiritual efforts is to always remember and repeat the name of God.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS

I am the holy fig tree among the trees, Narada among the sages, and I am all other celestial rulers. (10.26)

Know Me as the celestial animals among the animals and the King among men. I am the thunderbolt among weapons, and I am Cupid for procreation. (10.27-28)

I am the water-god and the manes. I am the controller of death. I am the time or death among the healers, lion among the beasts, and the king of birds among birds. (10.29-30)

I am the wind among the purifiers and Lord Rama among the warriors. I am the crocodile among the fishes and the holy Gangaa river among the rivers. (10.31)

I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all creation, O Arjuna. Among knowledge I am knowledge of the supreme Self. I am logic of the logician. (10.32)

I am the letter 'A' among the alphabets. I am the dual compound among the compound words. I am endless time. I am the sustainer, and I am omniscient. (10.33)

I am the all-devouring death and also the origin of future beings. I am the seven goddesses or guardian angels presiding over the seven qualities — fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intellect, resolve, and forgiveness. (10.34)

I am the Vedic and other hymns. I am the mantras; I am November-December among the months, I am spring among the seasons. (10.35)

I am gambling of the cheats, splendor of the splendid, victory of the victorious, resolution of the resolute, and goodness of the good. (10.36)

Both good and bad are the product of divine power (Maya). Maya creates a multitude of merits and demerits that have no real existence. The wise do not attach too much importance to it. One should develop good qualities and get rid of bad ones. After enlightenment, both good and bad, virtue and vice, are transcended, just as darkness vanishes after the sunrise. Vice and virtue are not two things, but one, the difference being only the degree of manifestation. It is true that God also dwells in the most sinful beings, but it is not proper to hate them or associate with them. Gandhi said: Hate the sin and not the sinner.

One should view the marvelous cosmic drama, full of pairs of opposites in life, with ever-joyous heart because there is no good or evil, only different masks of the cosmic actor. The scriptures denounce the idea of growing rich by unfair means, such as gambling, gifts, and bribes. They recommend honest labor, sweat of the brow, such as cultivating a cornfield, that is good for society as well as the individual (RV 10.34.13).

I am Krishna, Vyasa, Arjuna, and the power of rulers, the statesmanship of the seekers of victory. I am silence among secrets and Self-knowledge of the knowledgeable. (10.37-38)

I am the origin of all beings, O Arjuna. There is nothing, animate or inanimate, that can exist without Me. (See also 7.10 and 9.18) (10.39)

A big tree — with many branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds — remains inside a tiny seed in unmanifest form and becomes manifest again and again into a tree. The tree again becomes unmanifest into the seed. Similarly, all manifestations remain in the Absolute in unmanifest form and become manifest during creation and unmanifest during dissolution again and again. The fruit remains hidden in the seed and the seed in the fruit; similarly, God is in human beings and human beings in God.

MANIFEST CREATION IS A VERY SMALL FRACTION OF THE ABSOLUTE

There is no end of My divine manifestations, O Arjuna. This is only a brief description by Me of the extent of My divine manifestations. (10.40)

The variety in the universe, from the highest celestial controllers to the smallest insects and even the inert dust, is nothing but a manifestation of One and the same Absolute.

Whatever is endowed with glory, brilliance, and power — know that to be a manifestation of a very small fraction of My splendor. (10.41)

Through the word, His cosmic sound vibration, God made all things; not one thing in creation was made without His cosmic energy (John 1.03). This cosmic manifestation is non-separate from the Absolute just as sunshine is not separate from the sun (BP 4.31.16). The entire creation is a partial revelation and part and parcel of the Infinite. The divine manifests its glory through creation. The beauty and splendor of the visible universe are only a small fraction of His glory.

What is the need for this detailed knowledge, O Arjuna? I continually support the entire universe by a very small fraction of My divine power. (10.42)

Quantitatively, manifest creation is a very small fraction of the Absolute. The universe reflects the divine splendor for human beings to see the invisible Lord. One should learn to perceive God, not only as a person or vision, but also through His splendor as manifested in the universe and through His laws that govern and control nature and life. He is existence, goodness, and beauty.

11. VISION OF THE COSMIC FORM

Arjuna said: My illusion is dispelled by the profound words of wisdom You spoke out of compassion for me about the supreme secret of the Self. (11.01)

O Krishna, I have heard from You in detail about the origin and dissolution of beings and Your immutable glory. (11.02)

**VISION OF GOD IS THE ULTIMATE
AIM OF A SEEKER**

O Lord, You are as You have said; yet I wish to see Your divine cosmic form, O Supreme Being. (11.03)

O Lord, if You think it is possible for me to see Your universal form, then, O Lord of the yogis, show me Your transcendental form. (11.04)

There is no way to know God before experiencing Him. Faith in God rests on a shaky ground without a psychic vision of the object of devotion. All our spiritual discipline is aimed at this vision. The vision is essential to overcome the last bit of emotional impurity and any lingering doubt in the mind of the seeker because, to a human mind, seeing is believing. Therefore, Arjuna, like any other devotee, longs to see the transcendental form of the Lord.

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, behold My hundreds and thousands of multifarious divine forms of different colors and shapes. Behold all the celestial beings and many wonders never seen before. Also behold the entire creation — animate, inanimate, and whatever else you would like to see — all at one place in My body. (11.05-07)

But you are not able to see Me with your physical eye; therefore, I give you the divine eye to see My majestic power and glory. (11.08)

No one can see Him with the physical eye. His transcendental form is beyond our field of vision. He is revealed through the faculty of intuition of the intellect that, residing within the inner psyche, controls the mind. Those who know Him become immortal (KaU 6.09). We, like color blinds, are not able to see the full range of cosmic color and light with human eyes. The divine vision, which is a gift of God, is needed to see the beauty and glory of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

**LORD SHOWS HIS COSMIC
FORM TO ARJUNA**

Sanjaya said: O King, having said this, Lord Krishna, the great Lord of the mystic power of yoga, revealed His supreme majestic form to Arjuna. (11.09)

Arjuna saw the Universal Form of the Lord with many mouths and eyes, and many marvelous visions with numerous divine ornaments, holding many divine weapons, wearing divine garlands and apparel, anointed with celestial perfumes and ointments, full of all wonders — the limitless God with faces on all sides. (11.10-11)

If the splendor of thousands of suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, even that would not resemble the splendor of that exalted being. (11.12)

He came to tell about the light. This was the real light, the light that comes into the world and sustains everything (John 1.09). O Lord, not even a million suns could match You (RV 8.70.05). Robert Oppenheimer spoke this verse as he witnessed the explosion of the first atom bomb.

Arjuna saw the entire universe, divided in many ways, but standing as all in One and One in all in the transcendental body of Krishna, the Lord of celestial rulers. (See also 13.16, and 18.20) (11.13)

**ONE MAY NOT BE PREPARED TO SEE THE
LORD**

Having seen the cosmic form of the Lord, Arjuna was filled with wonder and his hairs standing on end, bowed his head to the Lord and prayed with folded hands. (11.14)

Arjuna said: O Lord, I see in Your body all supernatural controllers, and multitudes of beings, sages, and celestials. (11.15)

O Lord of the universe, I see You everywhere with infinite forms, with many arms, stomachs, faces, and eyes. O Universal Form, I see neither your beginning nor the middle nor the end. (11.16)

The Self is omnipresent, all pervading, beginningless and endless.

I see You with Your crown, club, discus, and massive radiance, difficult to behold, shining all around like the immeasurable brilliance and blazing fire of the sun. (11.17)

I believe You are the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the ultimate resort of the universe. You are the Spirit and protector of the eternal order (Dharma). (11.18)

I see You with infinite power, without beginning, middle, or end; with many arms; with the sun and the moon as Your eyes; with Your mouth as a blazing fire, scorching all the universe with Your radiance. (11.19)

O Lord, You pervade the entire space between heaven and earth in all directions. Seeing Your marvelous and terrible form, the three worlds are trembling with fear. (11.20)

Hosts of supernatural rulers enter into You. Some with folded hands sing Your names and glories in fear. A multitude of perfected beings hail and adore You with abundant praises. (11.21)

All the celestial beings gaze at You in amazement. Seeing your infinite form with many mouths, eyes, arms, thighs, feet, stomachs, and many fearful tusks, the worlds are trembling with fear, and so do I, O mighty Lord. (11.22-23)

ARJUNA IS FRIGHTENED TO SEE THE COSMIC FORM

I am frightened and find neither peace nor courage, O Krishna, after seeing Your effulgent and colorful form touching the sky and Your wide open mouth with large shining eyes. (11.24)

I lose my sense of direction and find no comfort after seeing Your mouths with fearful tusks glowing like fires of cosmic dissolution. Have mercy on me, O Lord of celestial rulers, and refuge of the universe! (11.25)

All my cousin brothers, along with the hosts of other kings and warriors of the other side, together with chief warriors on our side, are also quickly entering into Your fearful mouths with terrible tusks. Some are seen caught in between the tusks with their heads crushed. (11.26-27)

These warriors of the mortal world are entering Your blazing mouths as many torrents of rivers enter into the ocean. (11.28)

All these people are rapidly rushing into Your mouths for destruction as moths rush with great speed into the blazing flame for destruction. (11.29)

You are licking up all the worlds with Your flaming mouths, swallowing them from all sides. Your powerful radiance is filling the entire universe with effulgence and burning it, O Krishna. (11.30)

Tell me, who are You in such a fierce form? My salutations to You, O best of all celestial rulers. Be merciful! I wish to understand You, O primal Being, because I do not know Your mission. (11.31)

LORD DESCRIBES HIS POWERS

Lord Krishna said: I am death, the mighty destroyer of the world. I have come here to destroy all these people. Even without your participation in the war, all the warriors standing arrayed in the opposing armies shall cease to exist. (11.32)

Therefore, get up and attain glory. Conquer your enemies, and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. I have already destroyed all these warriors. You are merely My instrument, O Arjuna. (11.33)

This is My battle, not yours. I use you, O Arjuna, only as an instrument. I do everything through your body. One must remember at all times that all battles are His, not ours. The Koran also says: You are but an instrument, and Allah is in charge of all things. (Surah 11.12). The will and power of God do everything. No one can do anything without His power and will. It is God only who makes one restless for material life or spiritual life. Those who are not Self-realized mistakenly take their will as God's will and do wrong things.

Kill all these great warriors, who are already killed by Me. Do not fear. You will certainly conquer the enemies in the battle; therefore, fight! (11.34)

ARJUNA'S PRAYERS TO THE COSMIC FORM

Sanjaya said: Having heard these words of Krishna, the crowned Arjuna, trembling with folded hands, prostrated with fear, spoke to Krishna in a choked voice. (11.35)

Arjuna said: Rightly, O Krishna, the world delights and rejoices in glorifying You. Terrified demons flee in all directions. The hosts of sages bow to You in adoration. (11.36)

Why should they not, O great soul, bow to You — the original Creator — who is even greater than Brahmaa, the creator of material worlds? O infinite Lord, O God of all celestial rulers, O abode of the universe, You are both Eternal and Temporal, and the Supreme Being that is beyond Eternal and Temporal. (See also 9.19, and 13.12 for a commentary) (11.37)

You are the primal God, the most ancient Person. You are the ultimate resort of the entire universe. You are the knower, the object of knowledge, and the Supreme Abode. O Lord of the infinite form, You pervade the entire universe. (11.38)

You are the fire, the wind, the water god, the moon god, the Creator (Brahmā), as well as the father of the Creator (Brahmā), and the controller of death. Salutations to You a thousand times, and again and again salutations to You. (11.39)

My salutations to You from front and from behind. O Lord, my obeisance to You from all sides. You are infinite valor and boundless might. You pervade everything, and, therefore, You are everywhere and in everything. (11.40)

Considering You merely as a friend and not knowing Your greatness, I have inadvertently addressed You as O Krishna, O Yadava, and O friend merely out of affection or carelessness. (11.41)

In whatever way I may have insulted You in jokes while playing, reposing in bed, sitting, or at meals; when alone or in front of others, O Krishna, the immeasurable One, I implore You for forgiveness. (11.42)

You are the father of this animate and inanimate world and the greatest guru to be worshipped. No one is even equal to You in the three worlds; how can there be one greater than You, O Being of incomparable glory? (11.43)

Therefore, O adorable Lord, I seek Your mercy by bowing down and prostrating my body before You. Bear with me as a father to his son, as a friend to a friend, and as a husband to his wife, O Lord. (11.44)

Beholding that which has never been seen before delights me, and yet my mind is tormented with fear. Therefore, O God of celestial rulers, the refuge of the universe, have mercy on me and show me your four-armed form. (11.45)

ONE MAY SEE GOD IN ANY FORM OF ONE'S CHOICE

I wish to see You with a crown, holding mace and discus in Your hand. Therefore, O Lord, with thousand arms and universal form, please appear in the four-armed form. (11.46)

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, being pleased with you I have shown you, through My own yogic powers, My particular supreme, shining, universal, infinite, and primal form that has never been seen before by anyone other than you. (11.47)

O Arjuna, neither by study of the Vedas nor by sacrifice nor by charity nor by rituals nor by severe austerities can I be seen in this cosmic form by any one other than you in this human world. (11.48)

LORD SHOWS ARJUNA HIS FOUR-ARMED AND THE HUMAN FORM

Do not be perturbed and confused by seeing such a terrible form of Mine as this. With fearless and cheerful mind, now behold My four-armed form. (11.49)

Sanjaya said: After speaking like this to Arjuna, Krishna revealed His four-armed form. And then assuming His pleasant human form, Lord Krishna, the Great One, consoled Arjuna, who was terrified. (11.50)

Arjuna said: O Krishna, seeing this lovely human form of Yours, I have now become tranquil and normal again. (11.51)

LORD CAN BE SEEN BY DEVOTIONAL LOVE

Lord Krishna said: This four-armed form of Mine that you have seen is very difficult, indeed, to see. Even celestial controllers are ever longing to see this form. (11.52)

This four-armed form of Mine that you have just seen cannot be seen even by study of the Vedas or by austerity or by acts of charity or by the performance of rituals. (11.53)

No one attains the almighty Lord by good works alone (RV 8.70.03, AV 20.92.18). The omnipresent form of the Lord cannot be perceived by organs, but by the eyes of intuition and faith. The vision and yogic powers are the special gift and grace of God that may be granted, even without asking, when one is found fit by the Lord to use them in His service. According to Saint Ramdas, all visions of lights and forms have to be transcended before realization of the ultimate Truth. Yogic powers may become a hindrance on the path of spiritual journey.

However, through single-minded devotion alone, I can be seen in this form, can be known in

essence, and also can be reached, O Arjuna. (11.54)

One who dedicates all works to Me and to whom I am the supreme goal, who is my devotee, who has no attachment or selfish desires, and who is free from malice toward any creature — reaches Me, O Arjuna. (See also 8.22) (11.55)

12. PATH OF DEVOTION

SHOULD ONE WORSHIP A PERSONAL OR AN IMPERSONAL GOD?

Arjuna asked: Which of these has the best knowledge of yoga — those ever-steadfast devotees who worship Your personal aspect, or those who worship Your impersonal aspect, the formless Absolute? (12.01)

Lord Krishna explained the superiority of the path of spiritual knowledge in the fourth chapter (4.33, and 4.34). He explained the importance of worship of the formless Supreme (or Self) in verses 5.24-25, 6.24-28, and 8.11-13. He also emphasized the worship of God with form or Krishna in 7.16-18, 9.34, and 11.54-55. It was thus natural for Arjuna to ask which path is better for most people in general.

Lord Krishna said: I consider the best yogis to be those ever steadfast devotees who worship with supreme faith by fixing their mind on Me as their personal God. (See also 6.47) (12.02)

Devotion is defined as the highest love for God (SBS 02). True devotion is motiveless intense love of God to attain Him (NBS 02). Real devotion is seeking God's grace and serving with love to please Him. Thus, devotion is doing one's duty as an offering to the Lord with love of God in one's heart. It is also said that devotion is granted by the grace of God. A loving relationship with God is easily developed through a personal God. The faithful followers of the path of devotion to the personal God in human form such as Rama, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad are considered the best. The Bible says: I am the way; no one goes to Father except through me (John 14.06). Some saints consider devotion superior to Self-knowledge (SBS 05).

All spiritual practices are useless in the absence of devotion, the deep love of God. The pearl of Self-knowledge is born on the nucleus of faith and devotion only. Saint Ramanuja said that those who worship the manifest reach their goal sooner and with less difficulty. Love of God and all His creatures is the essence of all

religion. Jesus also said: You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love everybody as yourself (Matthew 22.37-39).

They also attain Me who worship the unchangeable, the inexplicable, the invisible, the omnipresent, the inconceivable, the unchanging, the immovable, and the formless — My impersonal aspect — restraining all the senses, even-minded under all circumstances, engaged in the welfare of all creatures. (12.03-04)

A person who is competent to worship the formless aspect of God must have a complete mastery over the senses, be tranquil under all circumstances, and be engaged in the welfare of all creatures. The path of personalism allows one to relish the name, form, and pastimes of the Lord as they happened when He manifested on the earth. The path of impersonalism is dry, full of difficulties, and advancement on this path is very slow as discussed in the next verse.

REASONS FOR WORSHIPPING A PERSONAL FORM OF GOD

Self-realization is more difficult for those who fix their mind on the impersonal, unmanifest, and formless Absolute because comprehension of the unmanifest by embodied beings is attained with great difficulty. (12.05)

One must be free from body-feeling and be established in feeling the existence of the Self alone if one wants to succeed in worship of formless Absolute. One becomes free from the bodily conception of life when one is fully purified and acts solely for the Supreme Lord. Attainment of such a state is not possible for the average human being, but only for advanced souls. Therefore, the natural course for the ordinary seeker is to worship God with a form. Thus the method of worship depends on the individual. One should find out for oneself which method suits one best. It is quite fruitless to ask a child to worship a formless God, whereas a sage sees God in every form and does not need a statue or even a picture of God for worship.

Loving contemplation and deity worship of a personal God is a necessary first step for realization of the impersonal Absolute. It is also said that devotion to the personal aspect of God leads one to the transcendental aspect. God is not only an extra cosmic, all-powerful Being, but the very Self in all beings. The worship of God as a person in the form of one's personal favorite deity stimulates divine love that rouses Self-consciousness and experience of unity in due course of time. God, the transcendent, is revealed in one's pure

inner psyche after the loving contemplation of God, the immanent.

There is no real difference between the two paths — the path of devotion to a personal God and the path of Self-knowledge of the impersonal God — in their higher reaches. In the highest stage of realization they merge and become one. Other sages also consider the path of devotion easier for most people, particularly for beginners. According to Tulasidasa, the path of Self-knowledge is difficult to comprehend, to explain, and to follow. It is also very easy to fall down from the path of knowledge or retreat to the lower sensual plane of consciousness (TR 7.118.00). In the next two verses, the Lord says that the path of devotion is not only easier, but also faster than the path of knowledge.

The personal and the impersonal, the physical form and the transcendental form, are the two sides of the coin of ultimate Reality. Ramakrishna said: “Image worship is necessary in the beginning, but not afterwards, just as a scaffolding is necessary during the construction of a building.” A person must learn to fix thoughts and mind first on a personal God with a form and then, after succeeding therein, fix them upon the transcendental form. The highest liberation is possible only by realization of God as the very Self in all beings, (BS 4.3.15, ShU 3.07) and it comes only through maturity of devotion to the personal God and His grace. This realization is the second (or spiritual) birth, or the second coming of Christ. Jesus said: The Kingdom of the Father is spread upon the earth, and people do not see. Another great saint said: It is like a fish in the water remaining thirsty and searching for water.

According to ancient scriptures, any spiritual practice becomes more powerful when it is done with knowledge, faith, and contemplation of a personal deity (ChU 1.01.10). Ascetic practice, prayer, charity, penance, performance of sacrifice, vows, and other religious observances fail to evoke Lord’s compassion to the same degree as unalloyed devotion does. The magnet of devotion easily attracts the Lord (TR 6.117.00).

But for those devotees — whose minds are set on My personal form, who worship Me meditating on My personal form with unswerving devotion, setting Me as their supreme goal, offering all actions to Me — I swiftly become their savior from the world that is the ocean of death and transmigration, O Arjuna. (12.06-07)

One can easily cross the ocean of transmigration with the help of the boat of unswerving love and devotion to a personal God with form (TR 7.122.00). The following verses explain four different methods of worship of God with or without the help of a form of God or deity.

FOUR PATHS TO GOD

People are born different. Anybody who prescribes one method for all is certainly deluded because there is no panacea. A single method or system cannot meet the spiritual needs of all. Hinduism, with its many branches and sub-branches, offers a very wide choice of spiritual practices to suit persons in any stage of spiritual development. All paths lead to salvation because they all culminate in devotion — the intense love of God.

Therefore, focus your mind on Me and let your intellect dwell upon Me alone through meditation and contemplation. Thereafter, you shall certainly attain Me. (12.08)

This is the path of meditation (See Chapter 6 for more details) for the contemplative mind. Thinking of a chosen form of God all the time is different from worshipping that form, but both practices are the same in quality and effect. In other words, contemplation is also a form of worship.

If you are unable to focus your mind steadily on Me, then long to attain Me by practice of any other spiritual discipline, such as a ritual, or deity worship that suits you. (12.09)

This is the path of ritual, prayer, and devotional worship recommended for people who are emotional, have more faith but less reasoning and intellect (See also 9.32). Constantly contemplate and concentrate your mind on God, using symbols or mental pictures of a personal God as an aid to develop devotion.

If you are unable even to do any spiritual discipline, then dedicate all your work to Me, or do your duty just for Me. You shall attain perfection by doing your prescribed duty for Me — without any selfish motive — just as an instrument to serve and please Me. (12.10)

This is the path of transcendental knowledge or renunciation, acquired through contemplation and scriptural study for people who have realized the truth that we are only divine instruments. (See also 9.27, 18.46). Lord Himself guides every endeavor of the person who works for the good of humanity, and success comes to a person who dedicates his or her life to the service of God.

If you are unable to dedicate your work to Me, then just surrender unto My will and renounce the attachment to, and the anxiety for, the fruits of all work by learning to accept all results with equanimity as God's grace. (12.11)

This is the path of KarmaYoga, the selfless service to humanity, discussed in Chapter 3, for householders who cannot renounce worldly activity and work full-time for God, as discussed in verse 12.10, above. The main thrust of verses 12.08-11 is that one must establish some relationship with the Lord — such as the progenitor, father, mother, beloved, child, savior, guru, master, helper, guest, friend, and even an enemy.

KarmaYoga, or the renunciation of the selfish attachment to fruits of work, is not a method of last resort — as it may appear from verse 12.11. It is explained in the following verse.

KARMA-YOGA IS THE BEST WAY TO START WITH

The transcendental knowledge of scriptures is better than mere ritualistic practice; meditation is better than scriptural knowledge; renunciation of selfish attachment to the fruits of work (KarmaYoga) is better than meditation because peace immediately follows renunciation of selfish motives. (See more on renunciation in 18.02, and 18.09) (12.12)

When one's knowledge of God increases, all Karma is gradually eliminated because one who is situated in knowledge thinks he or she is not the doer but an instrument working at the pleasure of the creator. Such an action in God-consciousness becomes devotion — free from any Karmic bondage. Thus, there is no sharp demarcation between the paths of selfless service, spiritual knowledge, and devotion.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF A DEVOTEE

One is dear to Me who does not hate any creature, who is friendly and compassionate, who is free from the notion of 'I' and 'my', who is even-minded in pain and pleasure, who is forgiving, who is ever content, who has subdued the mind, whose resolve is firm, whose mind and intellect are engaged in dwelling upon Me, and who is devoted to Me. (12.13-14)

To attain oneness with God, one has to become perfect like Him by cultivating moral virtues. The Bible also says: Try to perfect yourself, just as your Father in the heaven is perfect (Matthew 5.48). Saint Tulasidasa said: O Lord, anyone on whom You shower Your favor becomes an ocean of perfection. The monstrous squad of lust, anger, greed, infatuation, and pride haunts the mind so long as the Lord does not abide in the inner psyche. Virtues and discipline are two sure means of devotion. A list of forty (40) virtues and values is given in verses

12.13-12.19 by describing the qualities of an ideal devotee, or a Self-realized person. All these noble qualities become manifest in a devotee.

One is also dear to Me who does not agitate others and who is not agitated by them, who is free from joy, envy, fear, and anxiety. (12.15)

One who is desireless, pure, wise, impartial, and free from anxiety; who has renounced the doership in all undertakings — such a devotee is dear to Me. (12.16)

One who neither rejoices nor grieves, neither likes nor dislikes, has renounced both the good and the evil, and is full of devotion — is also dear to Me. (12.17)

One who remains the same towards friend or foe, in honor or disgrace, in heat or cold, in pleasure or pain; who is free from attachment; who is indifferent to censure or praise; who is quiet, and content with whatever one has, unattached to a place, a country, or a house; who is tranquil, and full of devotion — that person is dear to Me. (12.18-19)

It is said that divine Controllers with their exalted qualities, such as the knowledge of God, wisdom, renunciation, detachment, and equanimity, always reside in the inner psyche of a pure devotee. Thus, perfect devotees who have renounced affinity for the world and its objects and have love for God are rewarded by the Lord with divine qualities discussed above and elsewhere in the Gita, and are dear to the Lord. But what about those who are imperfect, but trying sincerely for perfection? The answer comes in the next verse.

ONE SHOULD SINCERELY STRIVE TO DEVELOP DIVINE QUALITIES

But those faithful devotees are very dear to Me who set Me as their supreme goal and follow — or just sincerely strive to develop — the above mentioned nectar of (forty) moral values. (12.20)

One may not have all the virtues, but a sincere effort to develop virtues is most appreciated by the Lord. Thus the striver is very dear to the Lord. The upper-class devotees do not desire anything, including salvation from the Lord, except for one boon: devotion to the lotus feet of a personal God, birth after birth (TR 2.204.00). Lower class devotees use God as a servant to fulfill their material demands and desires. The development of unswerving love and devotion to the lotus feet of the Lord is the ultimate aim of all spiritual discipline and meritorious deeds, as well as the goal of human birth. A

true devotee considers oneself the servant, the Lord as the master, and the entire creation as His body.

The path of devotion is a better path for most people, but devotion does not develop without a combination of personal effort, faith, and the grace of God. Nine techniques for cultivating devotion — an intense love for God as a personal Being — based on Tulasi Ramayana (TR 3.34.04-3.35.03), are: (1) The company of the holy and wise, (2) Hearing and reading the glories and stories of Lord's incarnations and His activities of creation, preservation and dissolution as given in the religious scriptures, (3) Seva or serving God through service to the needy, the saints, and society, (4) Congregational chanting and singing of the glories of God, (5) Repeating the Lord's name and mantra with firm faith, (6) Discipline, control over the six senses, and detachment, (7) Seeing your personal God everywhere and in everything, (8) Contentment and lack of greed as well as overlooking others' faults, and (9) Simplicity, lack of anger, jealousy, and hatred. The best thing a person should do is develop love of God. Lord Rama said that one needs to follow any one of the above methods with faith to develop love of God and become a devotee.

Good company of saints and sages is a very powerful tool for God-realization. It is said that friendship, discussions, dealings, and marriage should be with equals or those who are better than oneself, not with persons of lower level of intellect (MB 5.13.117). A person is known by the company he or she keeps. According to most saints and sages, the path of devotion is very simple and easy to perform. One can begin by simply chanting a personal mantra or any holy name of God. There is no restriction on the correct time or place for chanting the holy name of God. The process of devotional service consists of one or more of the following practices: hearing discourses, chanting the holy name of God, remembering and contemplating God, worshipping Him, praying to Him, serving God and humanity, and surrendering to His will.

The four inter-connected paths of yoga discussed in the first twelve chapters of the Gita may be summarized as follows:

The practice of KarmaYoga leads to purification of the mind from the stain of selfishness that paves the way for knowledge of God to be revealed. Knowledge develops into devotional love of God. Constant thinking of God, the object of our love due to devotion, is called meditation and contemplation that eventually lead to enlightenment and salvation.

IS THERE ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY TO GOD?

Lord Krishna has been talking about both manifest and unmanifest aspects of God in the previous chapters. Arjuna's question has been answered in great detail in this chapter, but people still argue that one method of worship or certain religious practices are better than others. Such persons only understand half the truth. In our opinion, it is quite clear that the method of worship depends on the nature of the individual. The person or the person's guru should find out which path will be most suitable for the individual, depending on the person's temperament. To force his or her own method of worship on people is the greatest disservice a guru can do to disciples. Introverts should worship a personal God, whereas extroverts may contemplate the impersonal aspect. The important thing is to develop faith in and love of God. God has the power to manifest before a devotee in any form, regardless of the devotee's chosen form of worship.

What has worked for one may not work for all, so what makes you think your method is universal? There was no need for the Lord to discuss different paths of yoga if there was one path for all. If the chosen path of spiritual discipline does not give one peace or God-realization, then it must be understood that one is not practicing correctly or the path is not right for the individual.

13. CREATION AND THE CREATOR

THEORY OF CREATION

Lord Krishna said: O Arjuna, this physical body, the miniature universe, may be called the field or creation. One who knows the creation is called the Creator (or the Spirit, Atma, God, Ishvara) by the seers of truth. (13.01)

Whatever is here in the body is also there in the cosmos; whatever is there, the same is here (KaU 4.10). The human body, the microcosm, is a replica of the universe, the macrocosm. The body is called the field of activities for the soul. The body or creation is different from the soul or the Creator. To experience this difference is the metaphysical knowledge.

O Arjuna, know Me to be the Creator of all the creation. I consider the true understanding of both the Creator and the creation to be transcendental knowledge. (13.02)

The body (or creation) and Spirit (or the Creator) are distinct from one another. Yet, the ignorant are not able to distinguish between them. That knowledge is the true knowledge by which one is able to make a clear distinction between body and Spirit. Body is called the field (or the medium) of activities for the Spirit. The

human body is the medium by which the individual soul enjoys the material world, gets entangled, and in the end attains liberation. The soul inside the body knows all the activities of its own body; it is, therefore, called the knower of the field of activities. The Supersoul knows all the bodies, whereas the individual soul knows only his own body. When one clearly understands the difference between the body, the individual soul inside the body, and the Supersoul, one is said to have real knowledge.

What creation is, what it is like, what its transformations are, where the source of creation is, who that Creator is, and what His powers are — hear all these from Me in brief. (13.03)

The seers have separately described the creation and the Creator in different ways in the Vedic hymns and also in the conclusive and convincing verses of other scriptures. (13.04)

The Gita also expounds on the truths of other scriptures. All scriptures, as well as saints and sages of all religions, draw the water of truth from the same ocean of Spirit. Their accent varies with the need of the individual and the society at the time.

The primary material Nature, the cosmic intellect, 'I' consciousness or ego, five basic elements, ten organs, mind, five sense objects, and desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the physical body, consciousness, and resolve — thus the entire field has been briefly described with its transformations. (See also 7.04) (13.05-06)

According to Sankhya doctrine (BP 3.26.10-18, 11.22.10-16), Spirit undergoes twenty-five basic transformations in the following order: Spiritual Being (Purusha, Chetanā, Ishvara) and the following twenty-four transformations of Total Energy (Prakriti, Mahat): Mind, Intellect, Consciousness (Chitta), and the conception of individuality (ego); the five basic elements, or raw ingredients, in subtle and gross form (ether or subtle substance, air, fire, water, and earth); the five sense objects (sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell); the five sense organs (ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose); and the five organs of action (mouth, hand, leg, anus, and urethra).

The Supreme Intellect is known by various names, based on functions performed in the body. It is called mind when it feels and thinks, intellect when it reasons, thought waves (Chitta Vriti) when it does the act of remembering and wandering from one thought to another, and ego when it has the feeling of doership and individuality. The subtle senses consist of all four — mind, intellect, thought waves, and ego. It is the Karmic footprints that actually make the final decision with the

help of mind and intellect. When the cosmic power does the functions of the body, it is called the bioimpulse (Vital life forces, Prāna). The Supreme Spirit or Consciousness manifests Itself as both energy and matter. Matter and energy are nothing but condensed forms of Consciousness. According to Einstein, mind and matter are both energies (Prāna). Ramana Maharshi said: The mind is a form of energy. It manifests itself as the world.

THE FOURFOLD NOBLE TRUTH AS MEANS OF NIRVANA

Humility, modesty, nonviolence, forgiveness, honesty, service to guru, purity of thought, word, and deed, steadfastness, self-control, aversion for sense objects, absence of ego, constant reflection on the pain and suffering inherent in birth, old age, disease, and death; (13.07-08)

Verse 13.08 of the Gita formed the foundation of Buddhism. The constant contemplation and understanding of agony and suffering inherent in birth, old age, disease, and death are called the understanding of the Fourfold Noble Truth in Buddhism. A clear understanding of this truth is necessary before starting the spiritual journey. A disgust and discontent for the meaninglessness and unreality of the world and its objects become a necessary prelude to the spiritual journey. As birds seek the shelter of a tree when tired, similarly, human beings seek the divine shelter after discovering the frustrations and joylessness of material existence.

Detachment with family members, home, etc.; unflinching equanimity upon attainment of the desirable and the undesirable and unswerving devotion to Me through single-minded contemplation; taste for solitude; distaste for social gatherings and gossips; steadfastness in acquiring the knowledge of the Self; and seeing the omnipresent Supreme Being everywhere — this is said to be knowledge. That which is contrary to this is ignorance. (13.09-11)

Cultivating the virtues described in verses 13.07-11 will enable one to perceive the body as different from the Self. Thus, one will attain Self-knowledge. Therefore, these virtues are called knowledge. Those who do not possess these virtues cannot get the true knowledge of the Self and will remain in the darkness of body-consciousness or ignorance.

When one becomes firmly convinced that God alone is everything — father, mother, brother, friend, enemy, sustainer, destroyer, and refuge — and there is nothing higher than Him to attain, and one has no thought of any other object, one is said to have

developed unswerving devotion to the Lord through single-minded contemplation. In this state of mind, the seeker and the sought-after become qualitatively one and the same.

THE SUPREME CAN BE DESCRIBED BY PARABLES, AND NOT IN ANY OTHER WAY

I shall fully describe the Supreme Being — the object of knowledge. By knowing this one attains immortality. The beginningless Supreme Being is said to be neither eternal nor temporal. (See also 9.19, 11.37, and 15.18) (13.12)

In the beginning there was neither Eternal Being (Sat, Brahma) nor temporal (Asat, Divine Beings, Devas) — no sky, no air, neither day nor night. There was nothing whatsoever other than the Absolute Supreme Being (RV 10.129.01, AiU 1.01). The Absolute is beyond both Divine Beings (celestial controllers, Devas) and the Eternal Being (Spirit) (Verse 15.18). Therefore, He is neither temporal nor eternal. The Supreme Being or the Absolute is also both temporal and eternal (Verse 9.19) and beyond temporal and eternal (Verses 11.37, 15.18) because He is everywhere, in everything, and also beyond everything. Therefore, the Absolute is all three — neither temporal nor eternal, beyond both temporal and eternal, as well as both temporal and eternal — at the same time.

The Supreme Being has His hands, feet, eyes, head, mouth, and ears everywhere because He is all-pervading and omnipresent. (13.13)

He is the perceiver of all sense objects without the physical sense organs; unattached, and yet the sustainer of all; devoid of the three modes of material Nature, and yet the enjoyer of the modes of material Nature by becoming the living entity. (13.14)

Self walks without legs, hears without ears, performs many actions without hands, smells without a nose, sees without eyes, speaks without a mouth, and enjoys all tastes without a tongue. All His actions are so marvelous that one finds His greatness utterly beyond description (TR 1.117.03-04). The Supreme Being may be described only by parables and paradoxes and in no other way. (See also ShU 3.19). Self expands Himself as the living entity to enjoy three modes of material Nature.

God does not possess a body like an ordinary being. All His senses are transcendental, or out of this world. His potencies are multifarious. Any one of His senses can perform the action of any other sense. All His deeds are automatically performed as a natural consequence.

He is inside as well as outside all beings, animate and inanimate. He is incomprehensible because of His subtlety. And because of His omnipresence, He is very near — residing in our inner psyche — as well as far away in the Supreme Abode. (13.15)

He is undivided, yet appears to exist as if divided in living beings. He is the object of knowledge and appears as the Creator (Brahmā), Sustainer (Vishnu), and Destroyer (Shankara) of all beings. (See also 11.13, and 18.20) (13.16)

One planet earth appears divided into so many countries; one country appears divided into several states; one state appears divided into counties, and so on; similarly, one Reality appears as many. These are apparent divisions because they have the same order of reality. The term God is used for the Generator, Operator, and Destroyer aspects of Self.

The Supreme Being is the source of all lights. He is said to be beyond darkness of ignorance. He is Self-knowledge, the object of Self-knowledge, and seated in the inner psyche as consciousness (or Ishvara in verse 18.61) of all beings, He is to be realized by Self-knowledge. (13.17)

I am the light of knowledge of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in the darkness of ignorance (John 8.12). One who knows the Almighty as much more radiant than the sun and beyond the darkness of material reality, transcends death. There is no other way (YV 31.18, SV 3.08). The Supreme is beyond the reach of senses and mind. It cannot be described or defined by words. Different means of attaining the Supreme continue below:

Thus, I have briefly described creation, as well as Self-knowledge and the object of Self-knowledge. Understanding this, My devotee attains My Supreme Abode. (13.18)

SUPREME SPIRIT, SPIRIT, MATERIAL NATURE, AND THE INDIVIDUAL SOULS

Know that both the material Nature and the Spiritual Being are beginningless. All manifestations and three dispositions of mind and matter, called modes or Gunas, are born of material Nature. Material Nature is said to be the cause of production of the physical body and organs of perception and action. Spirit (or Consciousness) in the individual soul is said to be the cause of experiencing pleasure and pain. (13.19-20)

Spiritual Being (by becoming jeeva) enjoys three modes of material Nature by associating with the material Nature. Attachment to the three modes of material Nature (due to ignorance caused by previous Karma) is the cause of birth of the living entity in good and evil wombs. (13.21)

Spirit is unaffected by material Nature just as the sun's reflection in water is unaffected by the properties of water. Spirit, because of His nature, associates with the six sensory faculties and ego of material Nature and becomes attached, forgets His real nature, performs good and evil deeds, loses independence, and transmigrates as a living entity (individual soul, Jiva) (BP 3.27.01-03). The living entity does not know the divine illusory energy (Maya), as well as the supreme controller and its own real nature. The individual soul is a reflection of the sun of Spirit in the water pot of human body.

The Spirit in the body is the witness, the guide, the supporter, the enjoyer, the controller of all events, and also the Supreme Self. (13.22)

Two aspects of Eternal Being — the divine Controller and the controlled (living entity, individual soul) — make their nest and reside on the same tree (the inner psyche of the body) as a part of the cosmic drama. Virtue and vice are its glorious flowers; pains and pleasures of sense gratification are its sweet and sour fruits. The living entities are like beautiful birds of various hues. No two birds are the same. Creation is just beautiful. And the Creator must be inconceivably beautiful. The living entity, due to ignorance, becomes captivated by the fruits of the tree and gets attached to material Nature, eats these fruits and becomes subject to bondage and liberation, whereas the divine controller sits on the tree, watches, and guides the living entity. The divine Controller, being unattached to material Nature, remains free as a witness and a guide (BP 11.11.06, See also RV 1.164.20, AV 9.09.20, MuU 3.01.01, ShU 4.06). The divine Controller remains unaffected and unattached to the modes of material Nature just as a lotus leaf remains unaffected by water.

Spirit is sentient, and material Nature is insentient. Material Nature, with the help of Spirit, produces five bioimpulses (Life forces, Prana) and the three modes. Spirit, residing as the divine Controller in the physical body that is a house with nine gates and made of twenty-four elements of material Nature, enjoys sense objects by associating with the modes of material Nature. Spirit forgets its real nature under the influence of divine illusory energy (Maya), feels pain and pleasure, does good and evil deeds, incurs the bondage of works done by free will due to ignorance, and seeks salvation. When the living entity renounces sense objects and rises above the modes of material Nature, it attains salvation.

The mind, endowed with infinite power, creates a body to reside in and fulfill its latent desires. The living entity becomes willingly entangled — and suffers like a silkworm entangled in its own cocoon — and it cannot get out. The living entity becomes bound by its own Karma and transmigrates. All actions, good or bad, produce bondage if performed with ego. Good actions are the golden shackles, and bad ones are the iron shackles. Both are fetters. The golden shackle is not a bracelet.

The living entity is like a farmer who has been given a plot of land that is the body. The farmer should take the weeds of lust, anger, and greed out of the land, cultivate it with the plow of intense desire for the love of God, and fertilize it with the firm faith in the power and omnipresence of God. Depending on the intensity of the desire and the degree of faith, the seedling of devotion will come out in due course of time. This seedling must be consistently and continually irrigated with the water of meditation on the chosen form of one's personal God. The forgetfulness of living entity's real nature disappears with the blooming of the flowers of Self-knowledge and detachment. The flowers bear the fruits of Self-realization and vision of God, leading to the freedom from transmigration of Jeeva, the individual soul, by the grace of Ishvara, the supreme controller.

They who truly understand Spirit and material Nature with its three modes are not born again, regardless of their way of life. (13.23)

Some perceive the Supersoul in their inner psyche through mind and intellect that have been purified either by meditation or by metaphysical knowledge or by selfless service. (13.24)

**FAITH AND DEVOTION CAN
ALSO LEAD TO NIRVANA**

Others, however, do not know the yogas of meditation, knowledge, and selfless service; but they perform deity worship with firm faith and loving devotion, as mentioned in the scriptures by the saints and sages. They also transcend death by virtue of their firm faith in what they have heard. (13.25)

Blessed are they that have not understood, yet have believed (John 20.29). If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for (Matthew 21.22). It is not necessary to completely understand God to obtain His grace, to love Him, and to attain Him. Any spiritual practice done without faith is an exercise in futility. Our intellect stands in the way as an obstruction to faith.

Whatever is born — animate or inanimate — know them to be born from the union of Spirit and matter, O Arjuna. (See also 7.06) (13.26)

One who sees the one and the same imperishable Supreme Lord dwelling as Spirit (or Ishvara) equally within all perishable beings, truly sees. (13.27)

When one beholds One and the same Ishvara existing equally in every being, one does not harm anybody because one considers everything as one's own self, and thereupon attains the Supreme Abode. (13.28)

One who perceives that all works are done by the powers of material Nature, truly understands and does not consider oneself as the doer. (See also 3.27, 5.09, and 14.19) (13.29)

The moment one discovers the diverse variety of beings and their different ideas abiding in One and coming out from That alone, one attains the Supreme Being. (13.30)

ATTRIBUTES OF THE SPIRIT (BRAHMA)

Because of being beginningless and unaffected by the three modes of material Nature, the eternal Supersoul — even though dwelling in the body as a living entity — neither does anything nor becomes tainted by Karma, O Arjuna. (13.31)

The eternal Supersoul is called attributeless because He does not have the three attributes of material Nature. The word 'attributeless' has been commonly misunderstood as formless. Attributeless refers only to the absence of material form and attributes known to the human mind. The Lord has an incomparable personality and transcendental qualities.

Just as the all-pervading space is not tainted because of its subtlety, similarly, the Spirit abiding in all bodies is not tainted. (13.32)

Spirit is present everywhere. It is present inside the body, outside the body, as well as all over the body. Actually, Spirit is inside and outside of everything that exists in creation.

Just as one sun illuminates the entire world, similarly, Spirit gives life to the entire creation, O Arjuna. (13.33)

According to Shankara, one sees the creation but not the Creator behind the creation due to ignorance, just as a person in the darkness of night sees the snake and not the rope that sustains the false notion of a snake. If

any object other than Spirit appears to exist, it is unreal like a mirage, a dream, or the existence of a snake in the rope. The absolute monism that negates all manifestation as a dream world is not the whole truth. According to the Vedas, God is both transcendent and immanent in one. The illustration of the world as a dream is a metaphor meant only to illustrate certain points and should not be stretched too far or taken literally. If the world is a dream, it is a very beautiful dream, indeed, of the cosmic dreamer who must also be extraordinarily beautiful.

They attain the Supreme, who perceive — with the eye of Self-knowledge — the difference between creation (or the body) and the Creator (or the Spirit), as well as know the techniques of liberation (See verses 13.24-13.25) of the living entity from the trap of divine illusory energy, Maya. (13.34)

Spirit emits its power (Maya) as the sun emits light, fire emits heat, and the moon gives cooling rays (DB 7.32.05). Maya is the inexplicable divine power of Spirit that does not exist apart from Spirit, the possessor of power. Maya has the power of creation. Maya also deludes the living entity by making it identify with a body, enjoy three modes of material Nature, and forget its real nature as Spirit, the basis of the entire visible and invisible universe. Creation is just a partial revelation of the power of Spirit and is called unreal like a dream world because it is subject to change and destruction. The clay is real, but the pot is unreal because the clay exists before the pot is created, while the pot exists, and after the pot is destroyed.

Creation is a natural effortless projection of the powers of Spirit and is therefore purposeless (MuU 1.01.07). The creative activity of the Lord is a mere pastime of the divine power (Maya) without any purpose or motive (BS 2.01.33). It is nothing but an apparent natural modification of His infinite limitless energy (E) into matter (m) and vice versa ($E=mc^2$ of Einstein) done as a mere pastime. Creation, an effect, is related to the Creator, the cause, as a piece of cloth is related to cotton. In the case of the cloth, however, the weaver is not sitting in every thread of the cloth, but in creation the efficient and material causes are one and the same, a divine mystery indeed! Everything in the universe is connected with everything else. Creation is not a mechanical or engineering construction. It is the supreme, spiritual phenomena revealing divine splendor. Creation is made by the Lord, of the Lord, and for the Lord. The Creator and creation is different as well as the same.

14. THREE MODES OF MATERIAL NATURE

Lord Krishna said: I shall further explain to you the supreme knowledge, the best of all knowledge, knowing this all the sages have attained salvation. (14.01)

Those who have taken refuge in this transcendental knowledge attain unity with Me and are neither born at the time of creation nor afflicted at the time of dissolution. (14.02)

ALL BEINGS ARE BORN FROM THE UNION OF SPIRIT AND MATTER

My material Nature is the womb of creation wherein I place the seed of Consciousness from which all beings are born, O Arjuna. (See also 9.10) (14.03)

Material Nature, a product of divine kinetic energy (Maya), is the origin of the entire universe. Material Nature creates living beings when the seed of Spirit is sown in it for germination.

Whatever forms are produced in all different wombs, O Arjuna, the material Nature is their body-giving cosmic mother; and the Spirit or Consciousness is the life-giving father. (14.04)

HOW THREE MODES OF MATERIAL NATURE BIND THE SPIRIT SOUL TO THE BODY

Goodness, activity or passion, and inertia or ignorance — these three modes (or ropes) of material Nature fetter the eternal individual soul to the body, O Arjuna. (14.05)

Of these, the mode of goodness is illuminating and good because it is pure. The mode of goodness fetters the living entity by attachment to happiness and knowledge, O sinless Arjuna. (14.06)

Arjuna, know that the mode of passion is characterized by intense craving for sense gratification and is the source of material desire and attachment. The mode of passion binds the living entity by attachment to the fruits of work. (14.07)

Know, O Arjuna, that the mode of ignorance — the deluder of the living entity — is born of inertia. The mode of ignorance binds the living entity by

carelessness, laziness, and excessive sleep. (14.08)

O Arjuna, the mode of goodness attaches one to happiness of learning and knowing the Spirit; the mode of passion attaches to action; and the mode of ignorance attaches to negligence by covering Self-knowledge. (14.09)

The mode of goodness keeps one away from sinful acts and leads one to Self-knowledge and happiness, but not to salvation. The mode of passion creates strong Karmic bonds and takes the individual further away from liberation. Such persons know right and wrong actions based on religious principles, but are unable to follow them because of strong impulses of lust. The mode of passion obscures real knowledge of Self and causes one to experience both the pain and pleasure of this worldly life. Such persons are very much attached to wealth, power, prestige, sensual pleasure, and are very selfish and greedy. In the mode of ignorance, one is unable to recognize the real goal of life, is unable to distinguish between right and wrong action, and remains attached to sinful and forbidden activities. Such a person is lazy, violent, lacks intellect, and has no interest in spiritual knowledge.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE MODES OF NATURE

Goodness prevails by suppressing passion and ignorance; passion prevails by suppressing goodness and ignorance; and ignorance prevails by suppressing goodness and passion, O Arjuna. (14.10)

When the light of Self-knowledge illuminates all the senses in the body, then it should be known that goodness is predominant. (14.11)

The sense organs (nose, tongue, eye, skin, ear, mind, and intellect) are called the gateway to Self-knowledge in the body. The mind and intellect get into the mode of goodness and become receptive to Self-knowledge when senses are purified by selfless service, discipline, and spiritual practice. It is also said in verse 14.17 that the rise of Self-knowledge takes place when one's mind gets firmly established in the mode of goodness. As objects are seen very clearly in the light, similarly, one perceives and thinks in the right perspective, and the senses shun whatever is improper. There is no attraction in the mind for sensual pleasures when the senses are illumined by the dawning of the light of Self-knowledge.

O Arjuna, when passion is predominant, greed, activity, undertaking of selfish work, restlessness, and excitement arise. (14.12)

O Arjuna, when inertia is predominant, ignorance, inactivity, carelessness, and delusion arise. (14.13)

A particular mode of Nature becomes dominant in the present life due to one's past Karma. The three modes fuel the vehicles of transmigration that carry one's baggage of Karma, as discussed in the following verses.

THREE MODES ARE ALSO THE VEHICLES OF TRANSMIGRATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL

One who dies when goodness dominates goes to heaven — the pure world of knowers of the Supreme. (14.14)

One who dies when passion dominates is reborn attached to action (or the utilitarian). One who dies in ignorance is reborn as a lower creature. (14.15)

The fruit of good action is said to be beneficial and pure; the fruit of passionate action is pain; and the fruit of ignorant action is laziness. (14.16)

Self-knowledge arises from the mode of goodness; greed arises from the mode of passion; and negligence, delusion, and slowness of mind arise from the mode of ignorance. (14.17)

They who are established in goodness go to heaven; passionate persons are reborn in the mortal world; and the insipid ones, abiding in the mode of ignorance, go to lower planets of hell, or take birth as lower creatures (depending on the degree of their ignorance). (14.18)

ATTAIN NIRVANA AFTER TRANSCENDING THE THREE MODES OF MATERIAL NATURE

When visionaries perceive no doer other than the three modes of material Nature (Gunas) and know the Supreme, which is above and beyond these modes, then they attain Nirvana or salvation. (See also 3.27, 5.09, and 13.29) (14.19)

Karmic laws bind one who does not believe that the Lord controls everything and who considers oneself the doer, enjoyer, and owner (BP 6.12.12). The power of doing all actions, good or bad, proceeds from God, but we are ultimately responsible for our actions because we also have the power to reason. God has given us the power to do work; however, we are free to use the power

in the right or wrong way and become liberated or bound.

The good Lord gives one only the faculties to act; He is not liable for one's actions. It is up to the individual to decide how to act. This decision is controlled by the modes of material Nature and is governed by one's past Karma. Those who understand this properly know how to act and do not blame God for their misfortunes or feel jealous of others' fortune.

Due to ignorance created by illusory energy (Maya), one considers oneself the doer and consequently becomes bound by Karma and undergoes transmigration (BP 11.11.10). Whenever one asserts or even thinks of oneself as doing things, one assumes the role of a doer, becomes accountable for the action (Karma), and gets caught in the intricate Karmic net of transmigration.

When one rises above, or transcends the three modes of material Nature that originate in the body, one attains immortality or salvation and is freed from the pains of birth, old age, and death. (14.20)

THE PROCESS OF RISING ABOVE THE THREE MODES

Arjuna said: What are the marks of those who have transcended the three modes of material Nature, and what is their conduct? How does one transcend these three modes of material Nature, O Lord Krishna? (14.21)

Lord Krishna said: One transcends the modes of material Nature who neither hates the presence of enlightenment, activity, and delusion nor desires them when they are absent; who remains like a witness without being affected by the modes of material Nature; who stays firmly attached to the Lord without wavering — thinking that only the modes of material Nature are operating. (14.22-23)

And one who depends on the Lord and is indifferent to pain and pleasure; to whom a clod, a stone, and gold are alike and to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike; who is of firm mind; who is calm in censure and in praise and indifferent to honor and disgrace; who is impartial to friend and foe; and who has renounced the sense of doership — is said to have transcended the modes of material nature. (14.24-25)

Guru Nanak said: One who obeys the will of God with pleasure is free and wise. Gold and stone, pain and pleasure are alike only for such a person.

BONDS OF THREE MODES CAN BE CUT BY DEVOTIONAL LOVE

One who serves Me with love and unswerving devotion transcends the three modes of material Nature and becomes fit for Nirvana. (See also 7.14 and 15.19) (14.26)

Unswerving devotion is defined as the loving devotion in which one does not depend on any other person, but only God for everything.

The mode of goodness is the topmost rung of the ladder leading to the Truth, but it is not the Truth as such. The three modes of material Nature have to be transcended, step by step. First, one has to overcome the modes of ignorance and passion and become established in the mode of goodness by developing certain values and following certain disciplines. Then one becomes ready to surmount the dualities of good and bad, pain and pleasure, and to rise to the higher transcendental plane by going beyond the highest mode — the mode of goodness.

Spiritual practices and vegetarian food raise the mind from the modes of ignorance and passion to the transcendental plane of bliss where pairs of opposites disappear. The mode of goodness is the natural result of profound thought generated by firm understanding of metaphysics. Anybody can easily cross the ocean of illusion (Maya), consisting of three modes of material Nature, by the boat of firm faith, devotion, and exclusive love for God. There is no other way to transcend the three modes of material Nature and attain salvation. It is also said that anyone situated in any one of the three modes of material nature can come up to the transcendental plane by the grace of a genuine and empowered guru.

Because I am the source of the immortal Spirit (Brahma), of everlasting cosmic order (Dharma), and of the absolute bliss. (14.27)

The Supreme Being is the source or the basis of Spirit. Spirit is one of the expansions of the Supreme Being. It is Spirit (of the Supreme Being) that performs the entire cosmic drama and sustains everything. Therefore, Spirit is also called the Supreme Being or the Lord.

It is very significant that Lord Krishna never used such words as “worship the Supreme God,” or “the Absolute is the basis of everything.” In this verse and elsewhere in the Gita, Lord Krishna declares that He is the Supreme Spirit. Krishna means different things to different people. Some commentators consider Krishna other than God; others call Him a “Hindu God.” To others Krishna is a politician, a teacher, a divine lover, and a diplomat. To devotees, Krishna is the incarnation

of the Absolute and the object of love. Readers would do well just to understand and use Krishna's teachings in their daily lives without getting confused about who was Krishna.

15. THE SUPREME BEING

CREATION IS LIKE A TREE CREATED BY THE POWERS OF MAYA

Lord Krishna said: The universe may be compared to an eternal, ever changing tree that has its origin (or root) in the Supreme Being and its branches below in the cosmos. The Vedic hymns are the leaves of this tree. One who understands this tree is a knower of the Vedas. (15.01)

The branches of this eternal tree (consisting of all the three worlds with its inhabitants) are spread all over the cosmos. The tree is nourished by the energy of material Nature; sense objects are its sprouts; and its firm roots — the desires — stretch below in the human world, causing Karmic bondage. (15.02)

The human body, a microcosmic universe or world, may be also compared to a beginningless and endless tree. Karma is the seed; five basic elements are its main branches; and the ten organs of perception and action are its sub-branches. Three modes of material Nature provide the nourishment, and sense objects are its sprouts. Senses' going towards sense objects is called desire. Fulfillment of desire gives sense pleasures and creates attachment. Desires are the roots of Karmic bondage in humans. This tree is ever changing, but eternal, without beginning and end. Just as the leaves protect the tree, so the rituals protect and perpetuate this tree. One who truly understands this marvelous tree, its origin (or root), its nature and working, is a knower of the Vedas in a true sense.

HOW TO CUT THE TREE OF ATTACHMENT AND ATTAIN SALVATION BY TAKING REFUGE IN GOD

The beginning, the end, or the real form of this tree is not perceptible on earth. Having cut the firm roots — the desires — of this tree by the mighty ax of (Self-knowledge and) detachment, one should seek that Supreme Abode, reaching which one does not come back to the mortal world again. One should be always thinking: I take refuge in that very primal person from which this primal manifestation comes forth. (15.03-04)

Creation is cyclic, without beginning and end. It is ever changing and has no permanent existence or real form. One must sharpen the ax of metaphysical knowledge and detachment over the stone of spiritual practice, cut the feeling of separateness between the living entity and the Lord, cheerfully participate in the drama of life made up of passing shadows of joys and sorrows, and live in this world completely free from ego and desires. When the attachments are severed, an attitude of sacred dispassion takes place, which is the prerequisite for spiritual progress.

That eternal goal is reached by the wise who are free from pride and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment, who constantly dwell in the Supreme Being with all lust completely stilled, and who are free from dualities of pleasure and pain. (15.05)

The sun does not illumine My Supreme Abode, nor does the moon, nor the fire. Having reached there, people attain permanent liberation (Mukti) and do not come back to this temporal world. (See also 13.17 and 15.12, and KaU 5.15, ShU 6.14, MuU 2.02.10) (15.06)

The Supreme Being is self-luminous, not illumined by any other source. He illumines the sun and the moon as a luminous lamp illumines other objects (DB 7.32.14). The Supreme Being existed before the sun, moon, and fire came into existence during creation, and it will exist even after everything gets dissolved into unmanifest Nature during complete dissolution.

THE EMBODIED SOUL IS THE ENJOYER

The eternal individual soul (Jiva, Jivatma) in the body of living beings is, indeed, My integral part. It associates with the six sense organs — including the mind — and activates them. (15.07)

In essence, Spirit is called Eternal Being or ‘Brahman’ in Sanskrit. Spirit is the true nature of the Supreme Being (ParaBrahm), and therefore is also called the integral part of the Supreme Being. The same Spirit is called individual soul, living entity, Jiva, soul, and Jivatma in the bodies of living beings. The difference between Spirit and the individual soul is due to the limiting adjuncts — the body and mind — similar to the illusion that the enclosed pot space is different from unlimited space.

Just as the air takes aroma away from the flower; similarly, the individual soul takes causal and subtle bodies from the physical body it casts off

during death to the new physical body it acquires in reincarnation. (See also 2.13) (15.08)

The individual soul takes the subtle body — six sensory faculties of perception, intellect, ego, and five vital forces — from one physical body to another after death, as the wind takes dust from one place to another. The wind is neither affected nor unaffected by association with dust; similarly, the individual soul is neither affected nor unaffected by association with the body (MB 12.211.13-14). Physical bodies are limited in space and time, but invisible subtle bodies are unlimited and all pervading. The subtle body carries the individual's good and bad Karma to the next life till all Karma is exhausted. When all trace of desires is eradicated after the dawn of Self-knowledge, the physical body seems not to exist any more and the conception of subtle body is firmed up in the mind. The astral or subtle body is an exact duplicate of the physical body. The beings in the astral world are more advanced in art, technology, and culture. They take up physical bodies to improve and enhance the physical world. Hariharananda Giri says: One may not perceive, conceive, and realize God if one does not seek the invisible subtle body.

During a wakeful state, the physical body, mind, intellect, and ego are active. In a dream state, the individual soul temporarily creates a dream world and wanders in it with a dream body without leaving the physical body. In deep sleep, the individual soul completely rests in the Eternal Being (Spirit) without being bothered by mind and intellect. Supreme Being, the Universal Consciousness, watches us as a witness during all the three states — wakeful, dream, and deep sleep. The living entity leaves one physical body and takes another body after death. The living entity becomes bound or lost, then tries to be liberated by discovering its real nature. Reincarnation allows the living entity to change its vehicle, the physical body, during the long and difficult spiritual journey to the Supreme Being. The individual soul acquires different physical bodies till all Karma is exhausted; after that, the goal of attaining the Supreme Being is reached.

It is said that Spiritual Being wears the veil of illusion, becomes an individual soul, and takes human and other forms just to perform the cosmic drama in which the writer, producer, director, all the players, as well as the audience are the same. Lord performs, plays, and enjoys His own creation. Our problems will disappear if we keep in mind that we are just playing a role and never take things very personally. In order to see the cosmic player, we must detach our mind from the play. Science deals with the knowledge of the cosmic play; spirituality deals with the knowledge of the cosmic Player as partially understood by the individual soul.

The living entity enjoys sense objects using six sensory faculties of hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell, and mind. The ignorant cannot perceive the living entity departing from the body nor staying in the body and enjoying sense pleasures by associating with the material body. But those who have the eye of Self-knowledge can see it. (15.09-10)

Senses lose their taste for material enjoyment when they develop a higher taste for the nectar of spiritual bliss. The attainment of spiritual bliss is the real fulfillment of one's desire for sense gratification. A purified soul will refrain from doing wrong things that arise from Vāsanā, the residual, subtle desires for sensual pleasures.

The yogis, striving for perfection, behold the living entity abiding in their inner psyche as consciousness, but the ignorant whose inner psyche is not pure, even though striving, cannot perceive Him. (15.11)

SPIRIT IS THE ESSENCE OF EVERYTHING

Know that light energy to be Mine that comes from the sun and illumines the whole world and is in the moon and in fire. (See also 13.17 and 15.06) (15.12).

The light of the sun is a reflection of His radiance (RV 10.07.03). The knowers of the Supreme Being visualize everywhere — in themselves, in every human being, and in the whole universe — that supreme cluster of light which is the source of the visible world and which shines like the all-pervading daylight (ChU 3.17.07). The world and its objects are only pictures made of shadows and light, cast on a cosmic movie screen (Yogananda). The Koran says: Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth (Surah 24.35).

The holy eternal light has the shape of a huge shining cluster of bright light energy. It is the light of the Supreme Being that is in the eternal light and in all the luminaries of the galaxies, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars. It is His light that is in wood, lamps, candles, and is the energy in all living beings. His light is behind all lights and the source of all energy in the universe. Without the power of the Supreme Being, fire is unable to burn a blade of grass. This light of the Supreme Being cannot be realized and seen unless one has completely stilled and strengthened the mind, purified the intellect, and developed the power of will and visualization. One must also be strong enough to bear the mental shock generated while experiencing the light of all lights in trance.

Just as the complete spectrum of sunlight is not visible to the human eye without a prism, similarly, we cannot see the light of the Supreme Being without the grace of God and scriptural reading. The yogis who have tuned-in their consciousness with the supreme consciousness can see the eternal light in trance. The entire universe is sustained by the (light) energy of the Supreme Being and reflects His glory.

Entering the earth, I support all beings with My energy. Becoming the sap-giving moon, I nourish all the plants. (15.13)

Becoming the digestive fire, I remain in the body of all living beings. Uniting with vital breaths or bioimpulses, I digest all types of food. (15.14)

And I am seated in the inner psyche of all beings. Memory, Self-knowledge, and removal of doubts and wrong notions about God come from Me. I am, in truth, that which is to be known by the study of all the Vedas. I am, indeed, the author as well as the student of the Vedas. (See also 6.39) (15.15)

The Supreme Being is the source of all scriptures (BS 1.01.03). The Lord resides in the inner psyche (or the causal heart) as the consciousness of all beings — not in the physical heart of the body as commonly misunderstood.

WHAT ARE THE SUPREME SPIRIT, SPIRIT AND THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL?

There are two entities in the cosmos: The changeable Divine Beings and the unchangeable Eternal Being (Spirit). All created beings are subject to change, but the Spirit does not change. (15.16)

Two aspects of divine manifestation — Divine Beings and the Eternal Being (Spirit) — are described here. The entire creation — including Lord Brahmā (the creative force), all celestial controllers, fourteen planetary spheres, down to a blade of grass — is the expansion of Divine Beings. Spirit is the Consciousness, the cause of all causes, from which Divine Beings, material Nature, and countless cosmos take birth, by which they are sustained, and into which they become dissolved again and again. Divine Beings and Spirit are called creation and the Creator, respectively, in verses 13.01-02, material and spiritual energy in verses 7.04-05, and Womb and seed-giving Father in verses 14.03-04. The Supreme Being is beyond both Divine Beings and Spirit, and is called the Absolute Reality in the scriptures and in the following verses:

The Supreme Being is beyond both the Temporal Divine Beings and the Eternal Being. He is also called the Absolute Reality that sustains both the Temporal and the Eternal by pervading everything. (15.17)

Because I, the Supreme Being, am beyond both the Temporal (Divine) Beings and the Eternal Being, therefore I am known in this world and in the scriptures as the Supreme Being (Absolute Reality, Truth, Supersoul) (15.18)

Basically, there are two different aspects (or levels of existence) — Temporal Beings (also called Divine Souls, Divine Beings, Temporal Divine Beings, Deva, celestial forces, guardian angels), and the Eternal Being (Spirit, Atma, Brahm) — of One and the same Absolute Reality known as the Supreme Being. The invisible, unchanging, and immutable entity is called Eternal Being. The Temporal Divine Beings are the expansions of the Eternal Being in the material world. The entire creation is ever-changing and mutable and is also called temporal. Both Temporal and Eternal Beings are expansions of the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being — the basis of both Temporal and Eternal — is the highest or the Absolute, who is referred to by various names. The personal aspect of the Absolute is called by names, such as Krishna, Mother, Father, and Allah. According to our scriptures, no one, except ParaBrahma Paramatma, has their own power or consciousness. Everyone, including the Eternal Being (Akshar Brahma), receives power from the Absolute, Lord Krishna.

The wise, who truly understand Me as the Supreme Being, know everything and worship Me wholeheartedly, O Arjuna. (See also 7.14, 14.26, and 18.66) (15.19)

Thus, I have explained this most secret transcendental science of the Absolute. Having understood this, one becomes enlightened, one's all duties are accomplished, (and the goal of human life is achieved,) O Arjuna. (15.20)

16. DIVINE AND THE DEMONIC QUALITIES

MAJOR DIVINE QUALITIES THAT SHOULD BE CULTIVATED FOR SALVATION

Lord Krishna said: Fearlessness, purity of the inner psyche, perseverance in the yoga of Self-knowledge, charity, sense-restraint, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, honesty; nonviolence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, equanimity, abstinence from

malicious talk, compassion for all creatures, freedom from greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, splendor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of malice, and absence of pride — these are some of the qualities of those endowed with divine virtues, O Arjuna. (16.01-03)

One must not condemn anybody and commend oneself (MB 3.207.50). We should treat others in the same manner as we would like ourselves to be treated (MB 12.167.09). A person of demonic nature needs to be dealt with and controlled differently than a person of divine nature (MB 12.109.30). No one is perfect. People do things because they don't know any better, so we should not censure them. We all pay the price for those who act out of ignorance. Speaking ill of others is the most heinous sin. Do not see others' faults; improve your own shortcomings until you yourself become enlightened.

One should not talk about, listen to, or even think about the faults and shortcomings of others. When we think about the defects of others, our own minds become polluted. Nothing is gained by finding fault with others; therefore, find your own faults and correct them. To love the unlovable, to be kind to the unkind, and to be gracious to the ungracious is really divine. It is said that we will have to account for how we treat others.

Values may also create problems if one forgets that people have different values; my values will be different from yours. A conflict of values between individuals ruins relationships. In practice, sometimes two values of the same person also conflict. For example, if telling a lie saves a valuable life, one should not tell the truth. One should not be blindly attached to values because a value is not absolute. We should neither sneer at any ideal nor judge others by our own standards because basic unity in variety is the plan of the creator.

All kinds of people make up this world. You want to change others so that you can be free, but it never works that way. If you accept others totally and unconditionally, only then you are free. People are what they are because they have their own backgrounds, and they cannot be otherwise (Swami Dayananda). You can love your spouse and not like the way he or she acts. Your enemy might become your friend if you allow him or her to be who he or she is. If you want to make an enemy, try to change someone. People will change only when it becomes more difficult to suffer than to change. No one is in a position to disqualify another's way of life, thinking, or ideas. Evolution on the ladder of perfection is a slow and difficult process. It is not an easy task to get rid of Karmic impressions of the past, but one must try. Changes come by one's own effort and when the season of the grace of God comes, not a day before.

Also, the manifestation of primordial energy, consciousness, is different in different beings. Therefore, seek reconciliation with everything in the universe, and everything will become your friend. Ramakrishna said: When divinity dawns, the human weaknesses vanish of their own accord just as the petals drop off when the flower develops into the fruit.

Mortals are helplessly tied like cattle by the rope of latent desires born of their Karmic footprints. This rope can be cut only if we use the God-given knife of intellect that animals do not have. A tiger is controlled by the instinct to kill and is helpless in this regard. Human beings are endowed with intellect and power to reason by which they can slowly and steadily cut the rope. We fail to use our power of reasoning and intellect due to ignorance. One's enemy is none other than the other side of oneself. Sometimes intellect is taken away by the trick of divine illusory energy (Maya) before the dawn of fate-born adversity. One must use intellect, the precious divine gift to human beings, to analyze the situation. There is no other way to get out of the vicious circle of Maya.

No one can hurt one who does not do violence to others by thought, word, or deed (VP 1.19.05). Even violent animals do not harm those who practice nonviolence by thought, word, and deed (MB 12.175.27). One who does not do violence to any creature, gets what one wishes and becomes successful in all spiritual disciplines without too much effort (MS 5.47).

The higher form of life uses the lower form of life as food for sustenance (MB 12.15.20). It is impossible to practice nonviolence — or any other value — in an absolute sense. Even farming operations involve violence to insects and earthworms. Practicing nonviolence towards all creatures is meant for our own evolution on the ladder of perfection. A minimal amount of necessary violence in the day-to-day practical life is required. Determination of minimum violence is, of course, very subjective. Violence should never be used in service of a personal grudge. It may be used to defend the weak or to uphold Dharma (order and justice).

DEMONIC QUALITIES THAT SHOULD BE GIVEN UP BEFORE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY CAN BEGIN

O Arjuna, the marks of those who are born with demonic qualities are: hypocrisy, arrogance, pride, anger, harshness, and ignorance. (16.04)

It is the universal practice to return the favor — in one way or another — to those who have been helpful to you (VR 5.01.113). An ungrateful person is the worst person. One must abandon such a person (MB 12.168.26). There is no atonement for ungratefulness in

this world (MB 12.172.25). It is said that even carnivores do not eat the flesh of an ungrateful person (MB 5.36.42). One must feel and express genuine gratitude if one accepts something from another person.

Divine qualities lead to salvation, the demonic qualities are said to be for bondage. Do not grieve, O Arjuna — you are born with divine qualities. (16.05)

Habits of sinful activity are very difficult to get rid of; therefore, one should always avoid sinful acts and practice good deeds (MB 3.209.41). Fundamental morality is the backbone of spiritual life. Self-knowledge without moral virtues is as incomplete as food without salt.

THERE ARE ONLY TWO TYPES OF HUMAN BEINGS — THE WISE AND THE IGNORANT

There are only two types (or castes) of human beings in this world: The divine, or the wise; and the demonic, or the ignorant. The divine has been described at length; now hear from Me about the demonic, O Arjuna. (16.06)

Self-knowledge manifests as divine qualities, and ignorance manifests as demonic qualities. Those who are in tune with the cosmic plan have divine qualities; those who are out of tune with the divine plan possess demonic qualities. Those who acted piously in their past lives are born with divine qualities, and those who were sinful in previous life are born with demonic qualities.

Persons of demonic nature do not know what to do and what not to do. They have neither purity nor good conduct nor truthfulness. (16.07)

They say: The world is unreal, without a substratum, without a God, and without an order. Sexual union of man and woman alone and nothing else causes the world. (16.08)

Adhering to these (and other) twisted, diabolic views, these degraded souls — with small intellect and cruel deeds — are born as enemies for the destruction of the world. (16.09)

Filled with insatiable desires, hypocrisy, pride, and arrogance; holding wrong views due to delusion, they act with impure motives. (16.10)

Obsessed with endless anxiety lasting until death, considering sense gratification their highest aim, and convinced that sense pleasure is everything, bound by hundreds of ties of desire and enslaved by lust and anger, they strive to obtain wealth by

unlawful means to fulfill sensual pleasures. They think: (16.11-12)

This has been gained by me today; I shall fulfill this desire; I have this much wealth and will have more wealth in the future; (16.13)

That enemy has been slain by me, and I shall slay others also. I am the Lord. I am the enjoyer. I am successful, powerful, and happy; (16.14)

I am rich and born in a noble family. Who is equal to me? I shall perform sacrifice, I shall give charity, and I shall rejoice. Thus they are deluded by ignorance, bewildered by many fancies, entangled in the net of delusion, addicted to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, they fall into a foul hell. (16.15-16)

Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with pride and intoxication of wealth, they perform service only in name for show, not according to scriptural injunction. (16.17)

These malicious people cling to egoism, power, arrogance, lust, and anger; and they deny My presence in their own body and in others' bodies. (16.18)

SUFFERING IS THE DESTINY OF THE IGNORANT

I hurl these haters, these cruel, sinful, and mean people, into the cycles of death and birth in the womb of demons (or degraded parents) again and again, according to their Karma. (16.19)

O Arjuna, entering the wombs of demons, birth after birth, the deluded ones sink to the lowest level without ever attaining Me (until their minds turn Godward by My causeless mercy). (16.20)

A never-ending war between good and evil forces is going on in each person's life. One takes birth to learn to purge the demonic qualities that block the gateway to God-realization. God appears only after the devil within us is completely subjugated. Spirit does not have any of the three qualities of material Nature. These qualities belong to body and mind only. Scriptures say: The divine, illusory energy (Maya) creates a multitude of pairs of opposites, such as good and evil, loss and gain, pleasure and pain, hope and despair, compassion and apathy, generosity and greed, perseverance and laziness, courage and cowardice, love and hatred, merits and demerits, and divine and demonic qualities. They have no real existence whatsoever. Therefore, it is wise not to

note any merit or demerit in people (BP 11.19.45, TR 7.41.00).

LUST, ANGER, AND GREED ARE THE THREE GATES TO HELL

Lust, anger, and greed are the three gates of hell leading to the downfall (or bondage) of the individual. Therefore, one must (learn to) give up these three. (16.21)

The Upanishad says: A golden gate (of lust, anger, greed, illusion, delusion, and attachment) blocks the passage to God (IsU 15). This gate can be opened by concerted, individual effort only. Lust, anger, and greed were created to control the entry of human beings to heaven and to lead them to the gates of hell. Lust, anger, and greed evaporate from the mind only after discovering that there is no 'I' and 'my'. Uncontrolled greed for material possessions of modern civilization may destroy the possessor by destroying the natural environment, the very support of life and civilization.

Selfish desire or lust is the root of all evil. Mundane desires are also the origin of all demonic qualities. These demonic or negative qualities, such as anger, greed, attachment, pride, jealousy, hatred, and fraud, are born out of desire and are also called sin. Desire, when fulfilled, brings more desires, thereby breeding greed. Unfulfilled desires cause anger. Anger is a temporary insanity. People do sinful acts when they are angry. They who act in haste under the spell of anger, repent afterwards. Ignorance of metaphysics is responsible for lust; therefore, lust can be removed only by acquiring Self-knowledge. Lust also obscures Self-knowledge as a cloud covers the sun. One must learn to control desires with contentment, and anger with forgiveness. They who have overcome desires have really conquered the world and live a peaceful, healthy, and happy life.

One who is liberated from these three gates of hell, O Arjuna, does what is best and consequently reaches Me. (16.22)

Lust, anger, and greed are the commanders of the army of illusion (Maya) that must be defeated before salvation is possible. The best way to become free from demonic qualities is to follow any one of the paths discussed in the Gita, as well as other scriptural injunctions.

ONE MUST FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS

One who acts under the influence of desires, disobeying scriptural injunctions, neither attains

perfection nor happiness, nor the Supreme Abode. (16.23)

The world becomes full of sweetness and beauty for those who live their life according to the law of the scriptures (RV 1.90.06). A scripture is the blueprint for society. It deals with every aspect of life and lays down the ground rules for proper development of all men, women, and children. For example, Manu said: Women must be honored and adorned. Where women are honored, there celestial controllers dwell pleased. Women must always be loved and protected from the temptation of evil-minded men. A woman's father protects her in childhood; her husband protects her in youth; and her sons protect her in old age (MS 3.56). Fortitude, righteousness (Dharma), friends, and spouse — these four are tested only during adversity. To be devoted — in thought, word, and deed — to each other should be the only religion, the only vow, and the only duty of a husband and wife (TR 3.04.05). The Bible says: Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies, and the wife should respect her husband. Respect, and submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5.21-33). However, men and women have differing roles to play in the cosmic drama; therefore, their needs and temperament are different.

One must not find fault or criticize any scripture because the scripture is the foundation stone of righteousness (Dharma) and social order. One can get name, fame, peace, and salvation by just following the scriptures (MS 2.09). The study of scriptures keeps the mind absorbed in high thoughts and is a spiritual discipline by itself. One is delivered by the practice of the truth of the scriptures and not by mere lip service. Guru Nanak said: One who preaches to others but does not practice the same, shall take birth again and again.

Let God, Gita, and Guru show us the way to enlightenment. People cannot be saved from the spell of divine, illusory power (Maya) just by using their own wisdom. They must follow a scripture with faith, especially in this age when it is difficult to find a true guru. Adherence to the high teachings of the scriptures will ward off all evil and bring about good. If a bridge is built, even an ant can easily cross the river, no matter how big a river is. Similarly, the scripture is the bridge to cross over the river of Maya. Therefore, one should always follow the guidance of a person who is well versed in the scriptures, as stated by the Lord in the following verse:

Therefore, let the scripture be your guide in determining what should be done and what should not be done. You should perform your duty following the scriptural injunction. (16.24)

The Ten Commandments of Hinduism according to sage Patanjali (PYS 2.30-2.32), are: (1) Nonviolence, (2) Truthfulness, (3) Non-stealing, (4) Celibacy or sense control, (5) Non-greed, (6) Purity of thought, word, and deed, (7) Contentment, (8) Austerity or renunciation, (9) Study of scriptures, and (10) Surrendering to God with faithful loving devotion.

Compare these with the ten basic teachings of the Bible: (1) Thou shall not kill; (2) Do not lie; (3) Do not steal; (4) Do not commit adultery; (5) Do not covet; (6) Do not divorce your wife; (7) Do for others what you want them to do for you; (8) If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek; (9) Love your neighbor as yourself; and (10) Love the Lord with all thy heart.

The Eightfold Noble Path of Buddhism is: Right view, right thought, right speech, right deeds, right livelihood, right effort, right resolve, and right meditation. Abstinence from all evil, performance of good acts, and purification of the mind is the doctrine of Buddha.

The five cardinal principles of Islam are: (1) Faith in God, His message, and His messengers; (2) Meditation and prayer on the glory, greatness, and the message of God for spiritual growth; (3) Helping others by giving charity; (4) Austerity for self-purification by fasting in the month of Ramadan; and (5) Pilgrimage to the holy places.

All great masters have given us Truth revealed by the Supreme. Krishna taught us to feel spiritual oneness by seeing divinity in each and everyone. Buddha taught us to purify ourselves and have compassion for all creatures. Christ asked us to love all beings as we love ourselves. Muhammad taught us to submit to the will of God and act like His instruments.

In some religions, however, only the members of one's own sect are considered favorites of God, and others are considered infidels. The Vedas teach not only mere religious tolerance but the acceptance of all other religions and prophets as analogous to one's own. The Vedas say: Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere (RV 1.89.01). The dignity and welfare of humanity lie in the unity of races and religion (Swami Harihar). True knowledge of religion breaks down all barriers, including the barriers between faiths (Gandhi). Any religion that creates walls of conflict and hatred among people in the name of God is not a religion, but selfish politics in disguise. We have no right to criticize any religion, sect, or cult in any way. Differences in human interpretation of scriptures — the transcendent voice — are due to taking the literal meaning, prejudice, ignorance, taking lines out of context, as well as distortion, misinterpretation, and interpolation with personal selfish motives.

17. THREEFOLD FAITH

Arjuna said: What is the mode of devotion of those who perform spiritual practices with faith but without following the scriptural injunctions, O Krishna? Is it in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance? (17.01)

THREE TYPES OF FAITH

Lord Krishna said: The natural faith of embodied beings is of three kinds: Goodness, passion, and ignorance. Now hear about these from Me. (17.02)

O Arjuna, the faith of each is in accordance with one's own natural disposition (that is governed by latent Karmic impressions (Samskāra)). One is known by one's faith. One can become whatever one wants to be if she or he constantly contemplates the object of desire with faith. (17.03)

One can attain success in any endeavor if one perseveres with firm determination (MB 12.153.116). Whatever a person of purified mind desires, is obtained (MuU 3.01.10). The doer of good acts becomes good, and the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous deeds and vicious by vicious acts (BrU 4.04.05). We all have the power to change. One becomes what one constantly and intensely thinks of, irrespective of reasons, such as reverence, fear, jealousy, love, or even hatred (BP 11.09.22). You always get what you look for — consciously or unconsciously. The thought produces action; action soon becomes habits and habit leads to success in any endeavor when it becomes passion. Become passionate about what you want to achieve, and you will achieve it. Passion brings out the dormant forces within us.

We are the products of our own thoughts and desires, and we are our own architects. Thoughts create our destiny. We become what we think. There is a tremendous power in our thoughts to draw on the negative or positive energies around us. Where there is a will, there is a way. We should harbor noble thoughts because thoughts precede deeds. Thoughts control our physical, mental, financial, as well as spiritual well-being. Never allow any negative thought or doubt to enter. We have such a great power at our disposal, yet the irony is that we fail to use it. If you do not have what you want, you are not committed to it one hundred percent. You are the cause of everything that happens to you. You should not expect life's very best if you are not giving your very best. Success is achieved by a series of

well planned steps taken slowly and persistently. Stephen Covey says: "The best way to predict your future is to create it." Every great achievement was once considered impossible. Never underestimate the potential and power of the human mind and spirit. Many books have been written and motivational programs developed for the practical application of the power of faith in this single mantra of the Gita.

Persons in the mode of goodness worship celestial controllers; those in the mode of passion worship supernatural rulers and demons; and those in the mode of ignorance worship ghosts and spirits. (17.04)

Ignorant persons of demonic nature are those who practice severe austerities without following the prescription of the scriptures, who are full of hypocrisy and egotism, who are impelled by the force of desire and attachment, and who senselessly torture the elements in their body and also Me who dwells within the body. (17.05-06)

THREE TYPES OF FOOD

The food preferred by all of us is also of three types. So are the sacrifice, austerity, and charity. Now hear the distinction between them. (17.07)

The foods that promote longevity, virtue, strength, health, happiness, and joy are juicy, smooth, substantial, and nutritious. Persons in the mode of goodness like such foods. (17.08)

One should eat good food for protecting and sustaining life as a patient takes medicine for protection from disease (MB 12.212.14). Whatever a person eats, his or her personal deity eats the same (VR 2.104.15, See also Gita 8.24). (Because) I am Thou, and Thou art I (BS 3.3.37). The food we eat becomes divided into three constituents. The grossest part turns into feces; the medium component becomes flesh, blood, marrow, and bone. Semen, the subtlest part, rises upward and nourishes the brain and subtle organs of the body by uniting with the vital force (ChU 6.05.01-6.06.02). Food is called the root of the body-tree. A healthy body and mind are the prerequisites for success in spiritual life. The mind will be healthy if the body is healthy. Persons in the mode of goodness like vegetarian foods. One can also become a noble person by taking vegetarian food because one becomes what one eats.

People in the mode of passion like foods that are very bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry, and burning, and cause pain, grief, and disease. (17.09)

People in the mode of ignorance like foods that are stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten, refuses, and impure (such as meat and alcohol). (17.10)

Purity of mind comes from purity of food. Truth is revealed to a pure mind. One becomes free from all bondage after knowing the Truth (ChU 7.26.02). Gambling, intoxication, illicit sexual relationships, and meat-eating are a natural, negative tendency of human beings, but abstaining from these four activities is really divine. One must avoid these four pillars of sin (BP 1.17.38). Abstaining from meat-eating is equivalent to performing one hundred holy sacrifices (MS 5.53-56).

THREE TYPES OF SACRIFICES

Sacrifice, enjoined by the scriptures and performed without the desire for the fruit, with a firm belief and conviction that it is a duty, is in the mode of goodness. (17.11)

Sacrifice that is performed only for show and aiming for fruit, is in the mode of passion, O Arjuna. (17.12)

Sacrifice that is performed without following the scripture, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of mantra, faith, and gift, is said to be in the mode of ignorance. (17.13)

A spiritual discipline or sacrifice is incomplete without a mantra, and a mantra is incomplete without a spiritual discipline (DB 7.35.60).

AUSTERITY OF THOUGHT, WORD, AND DEED

The worship of celestial controllers, offering service to the good, the guru, and the wise; purity, honesty, celibacy, and nonviolence — these are said to be the austerity of deed. (17.14)

Speech that is non-offensive, truthful, pleasant, beneficial, and is used for the regular reading aloud of scriptures is called the austerity of word. (17.15)

The path of truth is the path of spiritual progress. The Upanishad says: Only the truthful wins, not the untruthful. Truth is the divine path by which the sages, who are free from desires, ascend to the Supreme Abode (MuU 3.01.06). To be truthful is desirable. To speak what is beneficial is better than speaking truth. That which brings the greatest benefit to a person is the real truth (MB 12.329.13). The real truth is that which produces the maximum benefit to people. That which harms a person in any way is untrue and wrong —

although it may appear to be true at the first sight (MB 3.209.04). One may lie to protect the truth, but must not speak the truth for the protection of a lie.

A wise person should speak the truth if it is beneficial and keep quiet if it is harmful. One must speak the beneficial truth whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. Non-beneficial pleasant speech, such as flattery, should be avoided (VP 3.12.44). A pleasant speech is beneficial to all. One who speaks pleasantly wins the heart of all and is liked by everybody (MB 12.84.04). The wound inflicted by harsh words is very difficult to heal. The wise should never inflict such wounds on others (MB 5.34.80). Sweetness of speech and calmness of mind are the marks of a true yogi (Swami Atmananda Giri). One may lie — if it becomes absolutely necessary — to protect life, property, and righteousness (Dharma); during courtship; and for getting married (MB 12.109.19). Husband and wife should try to improve and help develop each other with tender loving care as a cow purifies her calf by licking. Their words to each other should be sweet, as if dipped in honey (AV 3.30.01-02).

Truth is the root of all noble virtues. One should present the bitter pill of truth with a sugar coating of pleasantness. Be truthful in a pleasant manner, but do not deviate from truth for the sake of pleasantness. Use candor with courtesy and avoid flattery. Speech should always be beneficial, truthful, and sweet. According to the Bible: It is not what goes into a person's mouth that makes one unclean; rather, what comes out of it (Matthew 15.11). Speech is the verbal reflection of one's personality, thinking, and mind; therefore, we should prefer silence to almost anything negative. Abstinence from harmful speech is very important.

The austerity of thought includes serenity of mind, gentleness, equanimity, self-control, and the purity of thought. (17.16)

THREE TYPES OF AUSTERITY

The above mentioned threefold austerity (of thought, word, and deed) practiced by yogis with supreme faith, without a desire for the fruit, is said to be in the mode of goodness. (17.17)

Nonviolence, truthfulness, forgiveness, kindness, and control of mind and senses are considered austerity by the wise (MB 12.79.18). There cannot be purity of word and deed without purity of thought.

Austerity that is performed for gaining respect, honor, reverence, and for the sake of show, yielding an uncertain and temporary result, is said to be in the mode of passion. (17.18)

Austerity performed with foolish stubbornness or with self-torture or for harming others, is said to be in the mode of ignorance. (17.19)

THREE TYPES OF CHARITY

Charity that is given at the right place and time as a matter of duty, to a deserving candidate who does nothing in return, is considered to be in the mode of goodness. (17.20)

Charity in the mode of goodness is the best purifying, beneficial, and righteous act. It equally benefits both the giver and the receiver (MB 13.120.16). If you give a charity or gift, watch yourself closely for ulterior motives; don't look for anything in return. One never does anything for others, but for one's own benefit. Even charitable works done for others are really done for one's own good (MB 12.292.01). It is the giver, not the receiver, who is blessed. Yogiraj Mumtaz Ali says: When you serve a less fortunate person in any way — material or spiritual — you are not doing him or her a favor. In fact, one who receives your help does you a favor by accepting what you give, thereby helping you to evolve and move closer to the divine, blissful being, who in reality is within all.

Charity taken unnecessarily — compelled by greed for name or fame — does great harm to the recipient. Improper charity harms both the giver and the taker (MS 4.186). Give anything you can — love, knowledge, help, service, prayer, food, but look for no return. Love — the cheapest charity — holds the key to enter His Kingdom. Charity is not only the best, but also the only use of wealth. However, all genuine requests for charity should be handled with delicate care and diplomacy because charity denied may create a negative feeling that is harmful.

Charity has no value if the money is earned by wrongful means (MB 5.39.66). To obtain wealth for meritorious or charitable deeds using wrong means is like soiling one's dress and then washing it. Not to soil the dress in the first place is better than washing the dress after soiling (MB 3.02.49). You cannot accomplish a worthy end with unworthy means. Ends and means are absolutely inseparable (Stephen Covey). It is not possible to help everybody by giving material goods and money. To pray for the physical and spiritual welfare of others in trouble or need — including ones not on your favorite list — is called mental charity.

Charity that is given unwillingly or to get something in return or looking for some fruit, is said to be in the mode of passion. (17.21)

Jesus said: When you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, but when you help

a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it (Matthew 6.02-03). Charity given anonymously is the best charity. To give charity to an unworthy person or cause and not to give to a worthy person, are both wrong and worse than giving no charity. Charity that is obtained without asking for it, is the best; charity that is obtained upon asking is the second best; and charity given unwillingly should be avoided.

Charity that is given at a wrong place and time to unworthy persons or without paying respect to the receiver or with ridicule, is said to be in the mode of ignorance. (17.22)

Be considerate and compassionate to those less fortunate than you. Charity should be given without humiliating the receiver. Charity given by humiliating the receiver destroys the giver (VR 1.13.33). One should always remember that God is both the giver and the receiver.

THREEFOLD ASPECT OF GOD

ParBrahma alone is all three — AUM (OM) TAT SAT — aspects of Reality. Persons with divine qualities, the Vedas, and sacrifice (or selfless service) were created by ParBrahma in the ancient time. (17.23)

Therefore, acts of sacrifice, charity, and austerity prescribed in the scriptures are always commenced by uttering any one of the many names of God (such as AUM, Amen, or Allah) by the knowers of the Supreme. (17.24)

The seekers of salvation perform various types of sacrifice, charity, and austerity by uttering: He is all or 'TAT' without seeking a reward. (17.25)

The word 'SAT or Truth' is used in the sense of Reality and goodness. The word 'SAT' is also used for an auspicious act, O Arjuna. (17.26)

Faith in sacrifice, charity, and austerity is also called Truth. Selfless service for the sake of the Supreme is verily termed as 'SAT'. (17.27)

Whatever is done without faith — whether it is sacrifice, charity, austerity, or any other act — is useless. It has no value here or hereafter, O Arjuna. (17.28)

18. NIRVANA THROUGH RENUNCIATION

Arjuna said: I wish to know the nature of renunciation (Samnyāsa) and sacrifice (Tyāga), and the difference between the two, O Lord Krishna. (18.01)

DEFINITION OF RENUNCIATION AND SACRIFICE

Lord Krishna said: The sages define renunciation (Samnyāsa) as abstaining from all desire-ridden work. The wise define sacrifice (Tyāga) as the sacrifice of, and the freedom from, a selfish attachment to the fruits of all work. (See also 5.01, 5.05, and 6.01) (18.02)

We have used the word 'renunciation' for Samnyāsa, and 'sacrifice' for Tyāga in this rendering. A renunciant (Samnyāsi) does not own anything. A true renunciant works for others and lives for — not on — others. Samnyāsa means complete renunciation of doership, ownership, and personal selfish motive behind an action, whereas Tyāga means renunciation of the selfish attachment to the fruits of all work, or working just for God. A person who does sacrificial services (Seva) for God is called Tyāgi or a KarmaYogi. Thus a Tyāgi who thinks that he or she is doing all works just to please God will always remember Him. Therefore, it is mentioned in verse 12.12 that Tyāga is the best spiritual practice. The words 'Samnyāsa' and 'Tyāga' are used interchangeably in the Gita because there is no real difference between the two (See verses 5.04, 5.05, 6.01, and 6.02). According to the Gita, Samnyāsa does not mean living in the forest or any other secluded place outside society. Samnyāsa is a state of mind that is completely detached from the outcome or the fruits of work.

Everybody desires peace of mind, but that is only possible for one who works for God without being attached to results and dedicates the results of all work to God. This is not necessarily the same as offering all one's material wealth and possessions to one's guru as propagated by some sects.

Some philosophers say that all work is full of faults and should be given up, while others say that acts of sacrifice, charity, and austerity should not be abandoned. (18.03)

O Arjuna, listen to My conclusion about sacrifice. Sacrifice is said to be of three types. (18.04)

Acts of service, charity, and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed because service, charity, and austerity are the purifiers of the wise. (18.05)

Even these obligatory works should be performed without attachment to the fruits. This is My definite supreme advice, O Arjuna. (18.06)

THREE TYPES OF SACRIFICE

Giving up one's duty is not proper. The abandonment of obligatory work is due to delusion and is declared to be in the mode of ignorance. (18.07)

One who abandons duty merely because it is difficult or because of fear of bodily affliction, does not get the benefits of sacrifice by performing such a sacrifice in the mode of passion. (18.08)

Obligatory work performed as duty, renouncing selfish attachment to the fruit, is alone to be regarded as sacrifice in the mode of goodness, O Arjuna. (18.09)

Renunciation of attachment to sensual pleasures is the real sacrifice (Tyāga). The perfection of Tyāga comes only after a person becomes free from the clutches of attachments and aversions (MB 12.162.17). There is no eye better than the eye of Self-knowledge, no austerity better than truth, no pain greater than attachment, and no pleasure greater than Tyāga (MB 12.175.35). One cannot become happy without Tyāga; one cannot become fearless without Tyāga; and one cannot attain God without Tyāga (MB 12.176.22). Even the bliss of trance should not be enjoyed just for the sake of enjoyment. The Gita recommends renunciation while living in the world — not renunciation of the world as commonly misinterpreted.

Christ said: If you want perfection, give away everything you have, and then follow Me (Matthew 19.21). No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and mammon — the material desires (Matthew 6.24, Luke 16.13). Christ did not hesitate to sacrifice his own life for the noble teachings. Lord Rama gave up His kingdom and even His wife for the establishment of righteousness (Dharma). Give up attachment and attain perfection by renunciation is the message of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Selfless service or 'Tyāga' is the essence of the Gita as given in this last chapter. A person who is Tyāgi cannot commit sin and is released from the cycles of transmigration. One can cross the ocean of transmigration and reach the shores of salvation in this very life by the boat of Tyāga.

The Nine Types of Renunciation leading to salvation, based on the teachings of the Gita, are: (1) Renunciation of actions forbidden by the scriptures (16.23-24), (2) Renunciation of lust, anger, greed, fear, likes and dislikes, and jealousy (3.34, 16.21); (3) Spurning of procrastination in the search of Truth (12.09), (4) Giving up feeling pride in one's knowledge, detachment, devotion, wealth, and charitable deeds (15.05, 16.01-04); (5) Rejection of selfish motives and attachment to the fruits of all works (2.51, 3.09, 4.20, 6.10), (6) Renunciation of the feeling of doership in all undertakings (12.13, 18.53), (7) Giving up thoughts of using the Lord to fulfill selfish, material desires (2.43, 7.16); (8) Spurning attachments to material objects, such as a house, wealth, position, and power (12.19, 13.09); and (9) Sacrifice of wealth, prestige, and even life for a noble cause and protection of righteousness (Dharma) (2.32, 4.28).

One who neither hates a disagreeable work, nor is attached to an agreeable work, is considered a renunciant (Tyāgi), imbued with the mode of goodness, intelligent, and free from all doubts about the Supreme Being. (18.10)

Human beings cannot completely abstain from work. Therefore, one who completely renounces selfish attachment to the fruits of all work is considered a renunciant. (18.11)

The threefold fruit of works — desirable, undesirable, and mixed — accrues after death to one who is not a renunciant (Tyāgi), but never to a Tyāgi. (18.12)

FIVE CAUSES OF ANY ACTION

Learn from Me, O Arjuna, the five causes, as described in the Sankhya doctrine, for the accomplishment of all actions. They are: the physical body, the seat of Karma; the modes of material Nature, the doer; the eleven organs of perception and action, the instruments; various life forces; and the fifth, the presiding deities of the eleven organs. (18.13-14)

These are the five causes of whatever action, whether right or wrong, one performs by thought, word, and deed. (18.15)

Therefore, the one who considers one's body or the Spirit (Atma, soul) as the sole agent, do not understand, due to imperfect knowledge. (18.16)

One who is free from the notion of doership and whose intellect is not polluted by the desire to reap the fruit — even after slaying these people — neither slays nor is bound by the act of killing. (18.17)

Those who are free from the notion of doership, free from likes and dislikes of their work, and detached from the fruits of work become free from Karmic reactions even for the act of killing.

The subject, the object, and the knowledge of the object are the threefold driving force to an action. The eleven organs, the act, and the agent or the modes of material Nature are the three components of action. (18.18)

THREE TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Self-knowledge, action, and agent are said to be of three types, according to Sankhya doctrine. Hear duly about these also. (18.19)

The knowledge by which one sees one and the same immutable, undivided divinity in all creatures — such knowledge is in the mode of goodness. (See also 11.13, and 13.16) (18.20)

The knowledge by which one sees each individual as different and separate from one another — such knowledge is in the mode of passion. (18.21)

The irrational, baseless, and worthless knowledge by which one clings to one single effect, such as the body, as if it is everything — such knowledge is in the mode of darkness of ignorance. (18.22)

THREE TYPES OF ACTION

Obligatory duty performed without likes and dislikes and without selfish motives and attachment to the fruit, is in the mode of goodness. (18.23)

Action performed with ego, with selfish motives, and with too much effort, is in the mode of passion. (18.24)

Action that is undertaken because of delusion, disregarding consequences, loss, injury to others, as well as one's own ability, is in the mode of ignorance. (18.25)

THREE TYPES OF AGENT

The agent who is free from attachment, is non-egotistic, endowed with resolve and enthusiasm, and unperturbed in success or failure is called good. (18.26)

The agent who is impassioned, who desires the fruits of work, who is greedy, violent, impure, and affected by joy and sorrow, is called passionate. (18.27)

The agent who is undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, wicked, malicious, lazy, depressed, and procrastinating is called ignorant. (18.28)

THREE TYPES OF INTELLECT

Now hear Me explain, fully and separately, the threefold division of intellect and resolve, based on modes of material Nature, O Arjuna. (18.29)

O Arjuna, that intellect is in the mode of goodness which understands the path of work and the path of renunciation, right and wrong action, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation. (18.30)

That intellect is in the mode of passion which cannot distinguish between righteousness (Dharma) and unrighteousness (Adharma), and right and wrong action, O Arjuna. (18.31)

That intellect is in the mode of ignorance which accepts unrighteousness (Adharma) as righteousness (Dharma) and thinks everything to be that which it is not, O Arjuna. (18.32)

THREE TYPES OF RESOLVE, AND THE FOUR GOALS OF HUMAN LIFE

That resolve is in the mode of goodness by which one manipulates the functions of the mind, Prāna (Life forces, bioimpulses) and senses for God-realization only, O Arjuna. (18.33)

That resolve is in the mode of passion by which one, craving for the fruits of work, clings to duty, wealth, and pleasure with great attachment, O Arjuna. (18.34)

Doing one's duty, earning wealth, material enjoyment, and attaining salvation are the four noble goals of human life for the householder in the Vedic tradition. Lord Rama said: One who is engaged only in sense gratification, abandoning duty and earning wealth, soon gets into trouble (VR 2.53.13). One who uses duty, earning wealth, and enjoying sensual pleasure in a

balanced manner without any one of the three being harmed by the other two attains salvation (MB 9.60.22). A person completely involved in acquiring and preserving material wealth and possessions has no time for Self-realization (MB 12.07.41). One can obtain all four noble goals by devotion to the Lord (VP 1.18.24). One should first follow Dharma by doing one's duty righteously. Then one should earn money and make economic progress, fulfill all noble material and spiritual desires with the money earned, and progress towards salvation, the only noble goal of human birth.

As human beings are always afraid of death, a rich person is always afraid of the tax collector, thieves, relatives, and natural disasters (MB 3.02.39). There is great pain in accumulating, protecting, and losing wealth. The desire for wealth accumulation is never satisfied; therefore, the wise consider contentment as the supreme pleasure (MB 3.02.46). People are never satisfied with wealth and material possessions (KaU 1.27). One should always remember that we are just the trustees of all wealth and possessions.

That resolve is in the mode of ignorance by which a dull person does not give up sleep, fear, grief, despair, and carelessness, O Arjuna. (18.35)

THREE TYPES OF PLEASURE

And now hear from Me, O Arjuna, about the threefold pleasure. The pleasure that one enjoys from spiritual practice results in cessation of all sorrows. (18.36)

The pleasure that appears as poison in the beginning, but is like nectar in the end, comes by the grace of Self-knowledge and is in the mode of goodness. (18.37)

One who enjoys the ocean of the nectar of devotion has no use for the sensual pleasures that are like water of a pond (BP 6.12.22). The river of material joy dries up quickly after the rainy season if there is no perennial source of spiritual water. Material objects are like straws to a Self-realized person.

Sensual pleasures that appear as nectar in the beginning, but become poison in the end, are in the mode of passion. (See also 5.22) (18.38)

Two paths — the beneficial spiritual path and the pleasant path of sensual pleasure — are open to us. The wise choose the former while the ignorant chooses the latter (KaU 2.02). Sensual pleasures wear out the vigor of the senses and bring diseases in the end (KaU 1.26). Sensual pleasure is not the object of precious human birth. Even heavenly enjoyment is temporary and ends in

sorrow. Those who are attached to sensual delights are like fools who choose poison in exchange for the nectar of devotion (TR 7.43.01). The ignorant ones, due to delusion, do not think that they are taking poison while drinking it. They only know after the result, and then it is too late (VR 7.15.19). It is the natural tendency of the senses to go easily toward external sensual pleasures as water flows downstream. Regrets follow the fulfillment of all sensual and material desires.

Worldly pleasure is like a mirage in the desert. Thirsty persons reckon it as water until they come to drink it and find nothing. Worldly happiness is temporary and flickering, whereas happiness derived from spiritual life is permanent and continuous. Ramakrishna said: One does not feel intensely restless for God until all worldly desires are satisfied. Manu is of the opinion that it may be easier to control the senses after enjoying sense pleasure and discovering its uselessness and harmfulness (MS 2.96). Desirelessness comes easily after most of our desires are fulfilled. A person may be healthy and wealthy but still unhappy without a taste of spiritual pleasure. A spiritually mature person does not miss worldly pleasures.

Pleasure that confuses a person in the beginning and in the end as a result of sleep, laziness, and carelessness, is in the mode of ignorance. (18.39)

There is no being, either on the earth or among the celestial controllers in the heaven, who can remain free from these three modes of material Nature. (18.40)

DIVISION OF LABOR IS BASED ON ONE'S ABILITY

The division of human labor into four categories is also based on the qualities inherent in peoples' nature or their make up. (See also 4.13) (18.41)

In the ancient Vedic system, activities of human beings were categorized into four social orders, based on the three modes of material Nature. These four orders are often mistaken for the caste system of modern times in India and elsewhere that is based on birth only. These four, universal, social orders of human society, as described by Lord Krishna, relate to persons' nature, quality, and work, not their birth. Those who were dominated by the mode of goodness and were peaceful and self-controlled were called Brāhmans. Those who were controlled by passion and preferred to engage in administration and protective services were labeled Kshatriyas. Those under the mixed modes of passion and ignorance, engaged in farming and trades, were called Vaishyas. Those mostly in the lowest mode of ignorance

were called Shudras, and their nature was to serve the other three social orders.

The Vedas compare human society with a person whose four main limbs represent the four broad types of work and workers in society. The Vedas also state that their words are for all mankind, for all people (YV 26.02). There are only two types (or castes) of people — the decent and the indecent (Gita 16.06).

Intellectuals who have serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, patience, honesty, transcendental knowledge, transcendental experience, and belief in God are labeled as intellectuals (Brāhmans). (18.42)

An intellectual is one who has the above-mentioned qualities (MB 3.180.21). Anybody may be called 'intellectual' if he or she possesses the divine gift of Self-knowledge (RV 10.125.05, AV 4.30.03). Intellectualism is an acquirement — a quality or state of mind — rather than a caste or creed. The illuminated ones who know the Absolute Truth and are in touch with the Supreme Being are the real Brāhmans and are next to God. All are born equal, but can become superior or inferior by deeds only.

Whenever a sector of any society gives predominance to caste, creed, race, religion, color, gender, or place of birth over the ability of an individual, the seeds of that society's downfall and inefficiency are planted and begin to grow. The devil of discrimination knows no national boundaries. It is unfortunately practiced by ignorant persons all over the world in one form or another. It is a human temptation and a manifestation of a superiority complex. The wise should try to overcome all types and shades of bias. All are the children of God, equal in His eyes, and should be treated as such. A person, for the progress of society, must be judged by his or her ability — not by any other standard.

Those having the qualities of heroism, vigor, firmness, dexterity, steadfastness in battle, charity, and administrative skills are called leaders or protectors (Kshatriyas). (18.43)

The ideal protector possesses uncompromising, unrelenting opposition to evil-doers in society. The duty (Dharma) of a protector is to fight all unrighteousness (Adharma) and injustice in society.

Those who are good at cultivation, cattle rearing, business, trade, finance, and industry are known as business men (Vaishyas). Those who are very good in service and labor are classed as workers (Shudras). (18.44)

A Shudra is a person who is ignorant of spiritual knowledge and identifies with the material body due to

ignorance. According to Lord Krishna, these four designations or types are not determined by birth. A Shudra-type person may be born in any family. The results of one's previous activities or Karma return as one's nature and habits.

People are either born with certain qualities or develop them through training and effort. One who does not have the requisite qualities of the four social orders of society, cannot be categorized improperly by virtue of birth or position only.

ATTAINMENT OF SALVATION THROUGH DUTY, DISCIPLINE, AND DEVOTION

One can attain the highest perfection by devotion to one's natural work. Listen to Me how one attains perfection while engaged in one's natural work. (18.45)

One attains perfection by worshipping the Supreme Being — from whom all beings originate and by whom all this universe is pervaded — through performance of one's natural duty dedicated to Him. (See also 9.27, 12.10) (18.46)

One's inferior natural work is better than superior unnatural work, even though well performed. One who does the work ordained by one's inherent nature, incurs no sin (or Karmic reaction). (See also 3.35, 5.10, 18.07, 18.09, 18.17, 18.23) (18.47)

Obligatory or natural work that is not forbidden by the scriptures, and is done without selfish attachment to the fruits and without the notion of doership, is sinless.

One's natural work, even though defective, should not be abandoned because all undertakings are enveloped by defects as fire is covered by smoke, O Arjuna. (18.48)

Nothing in this world has only good or only bad qualities. There is no perfect undertaking. All ventures have both good and bad aspects (MB 12.15.50). It is not what you do — but how you do it — that is important. Work becomes worship when done with an attitude of adoration of the Lord.

The person whose mind is always free from selfish attachment, who has subdued the mind and senses, and who is free from desires, attains the supreme perfection of freedom from the bondage of Karma by renouncing selfish attachment to the fruits of work. (18.49)

Learn from Me briefly, O Arjuna, how one who has attained such perfection, or the freedom from the

bondage of Karma, attains Supreme Being, the goal of transcendental knowledge. (18.50)

Endowed with purified intellect; subduing the mind with firm resolve; turning away from sound and other objects of the senses; giving up likes and dislikes; living in solitude; eating lightly; controlling the mind, speech, and organs of action; ever absorbed in yoga of meditation; taking refuge in detachment; and relinquishing egotism, violence, pride, lust, anger, and proprietorship — one becomes peaceful, free from the notion of 'I, me, and my', and fit for attaining oneness with the Supreme Being. (18.51-53)

When the torch of meditation fuses Selfless service, Self-knowledge, and devotional love during the thoughtless state of trance, the rays of enlightenment radiate, divine communion is perfected, the fog of ignorance disappears, and all material and sensual desires evaporate from the mind.

Absorbed in the Supreme Being, the serene one neither grieves nor desires. Becoming impartial to all beings, one obtains the highest devotional love for God. (18.54)

By devotion one truly understands what and who I am in essence. Having known Me in essence, one immediately merges with Me. (See also 5.19) (18.55)

There is no doubt God can be known only through faith and unswerving devotion (BP 11.14.21). There are numerous spiritual practices — not just one — prescribed in the scriptures to get that faith and unswerving devotion. Knowledge and devotion are one and the same like a tree and its seed. The entire process of spirituality gets started by the spark of grace that comes only as faith, and not by any other method.

Delusion of Maya prevents people from knowing and seeing God. As one cannot see the ever-existing salt in ocean water with the eye, but can taste it by the tongue, similarly, the Self can be realized only by faith and devotion, not by logic and reasoning. God may be realized not only by meditation and Self-knowledge, but also through ecstatic personal love and intense devotion to one's personal deity.

Only they know You to whom You make Yourself known; the moment one knows You, one becomes one with You (TR 2.126.02). The knower of the Spirit becomes like Spirit (BrU 1.04.10, MuU 3.02.09). The Kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17.21). No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless one is born again (by realizing that one is not this body, but Spirit behind the body) (John 3.03). Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child, will never go there (Mark

10.15). The Father and I are one (John 10.30). To truly understand God is to love Him and become one with Him. Liberation or Mukti is a state of mind.

A KarmaYogi devotee attains the eternal immutable abode by My grace — even while doing all duties — just by taking refuge in Me (by dedicating all action to Me with loving devotion). (18.56)

Sincerely offer all actions to Me; set Me as your supreme goal and sole refuge. Always fix your mind on Me and resort to KarmaYoga. (18.57)

Everything we use or eat should be first offered to the Lord, the giver of all things, before we put it to our own use. This includes — but is not limited to — food, a new dress, a new car, a new house, and a new baby. Offering everything to the Lord is the highest form of worship that one has to learn and practice every day. According to Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji) this verse means to have His name in your heart and on your lips, and to have His work in your hands.

KarmaYoga saves one from being entangled in the wheels of transmigration and leads to liberation. KarmaYoga is recommended even for one who does not believe in God, who has no knowledge of God, who has no faith and devotion, and consequently cannot follow any other spiritual path.

You shall overcome all difficulties by My grace when your mind becomes fixed on Me. But if you do not listen to Me due to ego, you shall perish. (18.58)

KARMIC BONDAGE AND THE FREE WILL

If due to ego you think: I shall not fight, your resolve is vain because your own nature will compel you to fight. (18.59)

O Arjuna, you are controlled by your own nature-born Karmic impressions. Therefore, you shall do — even against your will — what you do not wish to do out of delusion. (18.60)

The mind often knows right and wrong, but it runs after evil — reluctantly — by the force of Karmic footprints. The wise should always keep this in mind before finding fault with others.

WE BECOME THE PUPPETS OF OUR OWN FREEWILL

To satisfy the free will of the ignorant, overwhelmed by the three modes of material Nature, the good Lord creates an environment conducive for

engaging in unwanted actions. Our free will is like the very limited freedom of a dog on a leash. As a facilitator, God reciprocates with everyone according to their desires and allows them to fulfill desires generated by free will. Lord uses His illusory kinetic energy called Maya to engage the living entities in good and bad acts according to their desires and their previously accumulated good and bad Karma.

The Supreme Lord — abiding as the controller in the inner psyche of all beings, O Arjuna — causes them to revolve, by His power of Maya, like a puppet mounted on a machine. (18.61)

The Supreme Controller (Ishvara) is the reflection of the Supreme Spirit in the body. The Supreme Lord organizes, controls, supervises, and directs everything in the universe. Jiva is like a puppet of Karma mounted on a body which is the vehicle of transmigration. The word revolve (or evolve) refers to working out of one's Karma. Thus we become the puppet of our own Karma created by our free will.

The Lord has made Karmic laws as the controller of all living beings. Therefore, one must learn to gladly endure all that fate imposes by taking refuge in Him and following the commandments (TR 2.218.02). Vedas declare that the Lord, using Karma, makes us dance as a juggler would make his monkey dance (TR 4.6.12). Without the laws of Karma, the scriptural injunctions, prohibitions, as well as self-effort, would have no value at all. Karma is the eternal justice and the eternal law. As a result of the working of eternal justice, there can be no escape from the consequences of our deeds. We become the product of our own past thinking and action. Therefore, we must think and act wisely at the present moment, using the scriptures as a guide.

The doctrine of Karma and reincarnation is also found in the following two verses of the Koran: Allah is He who created you and then sustained you, then causes you to die, then gives life to you again (Surah 30.40). He may reward those who believe and do good works. No one is able to escape His law of consequences (Surah 30.45). People cannot escape from the consequences of their deeds, for as we sow, so we reap. Cause and effect cannot be separated because the effect exists in the cause as the fruit exists in the seed. Good and evil deeds follow us continually like our shadows.

The Bible also says: Whosoever shedeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed (Genesis 9.06). It is believed that all references to Karma and reincarnation were taken out of the Bible during the second century with the noble aim of encouraging people to strive hard for perfection during this very life. Those who believe in reincarnation must avoid laziness and procrastination,

stress intense spiritual discipline, and try their best to get Self-realization in this very life as if there were no reincarnation. Live as though this is your last day on this earth. One cannot achieve anything through laziness and procrastination.

One cannot take wealth, fame, and power from here to hereafter; but one can convert these into good or bad Karma and carry it to the next life. Even death cannot touch one's Karma. Those who have acted very piously in the past life achieve fame in this life without much endeavor.

Seek refuge in the Supreme Lord alone, with loving devotion, O Arjuna. By His grace you shall attain supreme peace and the Eternal Abode. (18.62)

Thus, I have explained the knowledge that is more secret than the secret. After fully reflecting on this, do as you wish. (18.63)

PATH OF SURRENDER IS THE ULTIMATE PATH TO GOD

Hear once again My most secret, supreme word. You are very dear to Me; therefore, I shall tell this for your benefit. (18.64)

Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, offer service to Me, bow down to Me, and you shall certainly reach Me. I promise you because you are My very dear friend. (18.65)

Setting aside all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve. (18.66)

The meaning of abandoning all duties and taking refuge in the Lord is that a seeker should perform all duties without selfish attachment as an offering to the Lord and totally depend only on the Lord for help and guidance. The Lord takes full responsibility for a person who totally depends on Him. If you find a good solution and get attached to it, the solution will soon become your next problem. The scripture says: The wise should not be attached even to righteous deeds for their entire life, but should engage their mind and intellect in contemplation of the Supreme Being (MB 12.290.21). One should develop a spirit of genuine self-surrender to the Lord by offering everything to Him, including the fruits of spiritual discipline. We should connect all our work with the divine. The world is controlled by the laws or will of God. One has to learn to abide by His will. Be thankful in prosperity and resigned to His will in adversity.

In order to be free from pious or impious results that bind one to this material world, it is necessary to offer every action to God. When a devotee sincerely works for God, God protects that devotee from the touch of Maya, the external energy of the Lord. If one voluntarily depends on the supreme Lord under all circumstances, then the good and bad results (sins) of work automatically go to Him, and one is free from sin.

A true devotee perceives: O Lord, I remembered You because You remembered me first. One breaks away every yoke of bondage and becomes free in this very life as soon as one gains the knowledge and a firm conviction that everything is done by the will of God, that it is His world, His sport, and His battle, not ours, and regards oneself as a mere actor in the divine play and the Lord as the great director in the cosmic drama of the soul on the stage of creation. Surrendering of individual will to divine will is the culmination of all spiritual practices, resulting in joyful participation in the drama of joys and sorrows of life. This is called liberation, or Mahāyāna in Buddhism. One cannot see God as long as one does not completely get rid of desire, attachment, and the notion of doership or ego. The miracle of grace is triggered when ego realizes: One is not the doer, and through no human effort alone can desire be completely erased. Lord arranges for the science of Self-realization to be revealed to such a surrendered soul and the gate of Nirvana opens up.

Surrendering to God does not involve leaving the world, but realizing that everything happens in accordance with His laws and by His direction and power. To fully recognize that everything is controlled and governed by a divine plan is to surrender to Him. In surrender one lets the divine plan rule one's life without giving up one's best effort. It is the complete renunciation of individual existence or the ego. It is the feeling: O my beloved Lord, nothing is mine, everything — including my body, mind, and ego — is Yours. I am not God, but a servant of God; save me from the ocean of transmigration. I tried to get out of the ocean of the material world using all the methods given in the scriptures, and failed. Now I have discovered the ultimate process — the process of seeking divine grace through prayer and surrender. God can be discovered by seeking His help in discovering Him and not by spiritual practices alone. Thus, one should start the spiritual journey as a dualist, experience monism, and again come back to dualism. A successful journey begins and ends at the same place.

The process of surrender may be called the fifth or the ultimate path of yoga — the other four being the path of selfless service, metaphysical knowledge, devotion, and meditation. The Good Lord directs the mind and senses of the living entities according to their

Karma-born desires. But in case of surrendered devotees, however, He controls the senses directly according to His desires and in the best interest of the devotee. Let Him be the driver of your spiritual journey and you just enjoy the ride. Muniji beautifully explains this process. He says: Every pain, every ache, every discomfort becomes His gift and grace when you lay it in His lap. If you put the reins of your life-chariot in His hands, you will be ever happy, ever peaceful. This is the lesson of ultimate surrender.

It is the divine grace or power that comes in the form of self-effort. The divine grace and self-effort, as well as dualism and monism, are nothing but two sides of the same coin of Reality. The grace of God is always available — one has to collect it. To win the grace is not easy. One has to earn it by sincere, spiritual discipline and effort. Grace is the cream of that effort — our own good Karma. It is said that self-effort is absolutely necessary, but the last rung of the ladder to the Supreme is not self-effort, but praying for His grace in the spirit of surrender. When everything is surrendered to Him and one truly understands that He is the goal, the path, the traveler, as well as the obstacles on the path, vice and virtue become powerless and harmless as a cobra with fangs removed.

According to Shankara, if any object other than the Supreme Being — the Cosmic Energy Field — appears to exist, it is unreal like a mirage or like the presence of a snake in the rope. When one firmly understands that there is nothing else except the Supreme Being and His sport, all Karma gets exhausted; one surrenders to His will, and attains salvation. Yukteshwar said: Human life is beset with sorrow until we know how to surrender or tune in with the divine will that baffles our intellect. The Koran says: Whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them; neither shall they grieve (Surah 2.38). The Upanishad says: The knower of the Supreme goes beyond grief.

This knowledge should never be spoken by you to one who is devoid of austerity, who is without devotion, who does not desire to listen, or who speaks ill of Me. (18.67)

To speak of wisdom to a deluded person, to glorify sacrifice to a greedy person, to advise sense control to an irascible person, and to discourse on Lord Rama's exploits to a lecher, is as useless as sowing seed on barren ground (TR 5.57.01-02). It is not for any soul to believe, save by the permission of Allah. You should not compel one to believe (Surah 10.100-101). Anyone to whom God has not granted the light (of knowledge) will have no light (Surah 24.40). The study of Gita is meant only for sincere persons. According to Ramakrishna, one can understand Him as much as He

makes one understand. Guru Nanak said: O Beloved; only they to whom You give the divine knowledge, obtain it.

According to the Bible: Do not give what is holy to dogs. Do not throw your pearls in front of pigs. They will only trample them under their feet (Matthew 7.06). No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him or her to me (John 6.44). The recipient of knowledge must have spiritual inclination and sincerely seek it. Knowledge given without being asked for serves no purpose and should be avoided. There is a time for everything under the heaven. We cannot change the world; we can change only the lives of a few sincere souls whose time for a change has come by His grace.

THE HIGHEST SERVICE TO GOD, AND THE BEST CHARITY

One who shall propagate this supreme secret philosophy — the transcendental knowledge of the Gita — amongst My devotees, shall be performing the highest devotional service to Me and shall certainly come to Me. No other person shall do a more pleasing service to Me, and no one on the earth shall be more dear to Me. (18.68-69)

Ignorance is the mother of all sins. All negative qualities, such as lust, anger, and greed, are nothing but a manifestation of ignorance. The giving of the gift of knowledge is the best charity. It is equivalent to giving the whole world in charity (MB 12.209.113). The best welfare is to help others discover their real nature that is the source of everlasting happiness rather than to provide material goods and comforts for temporary happiness. The Bible says: Whoever obeys the law, and teaches others to do the same, will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5.19). Happiness is not attained through wealth and sense gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy cause (Helen Keller).

GRACE OF THE GITA

Those who study our sacred dialogue shall be performing a holy act of propagation and acquisition of self-knowledge. This is My promise. (18.70)

God and His words are one and the same. The study of the Gita is equivalent to worship of God. Life in modern society is all work and no spirituality. Swami Harihar says: "Daily study of only a few verses of the Gita will recharge mental batteries and add meaning to the dull routine life of modern society." For serious students, daily study of one chapter of the Gita or several

verses from the forty selected verses given in the end of this book is highly recommended.

In verses 18.68-70 Lord Krishna declares that studying, teaching, and propagating the spiritual knowledge of the Gita itself to be the highest form of KarmaYoga, BhaktiYoga and JñānaYoga all combined in one easy to practice process. This alone can take a seeker to enlightenment.

Whoever hears this sacred dialogue with faith and without cavil becomes free from sin, and attains heaven — the higher worlds of those whose actions are pure and virtuous. (18.71)

A summary of the Glory of the Gita as elaborated in the scriptures is given below. Reading this Glory of the Gita generates faith and devotion in the heart that is essential for reaping the benefits of the study of the Gita.

The goal of human birth is to master the mind and senses and reach one's destiny. A regular study of the Gita is sure to help achieve this noble goal. One who is regular in the study of the Gita becomes happy, peaceful, prosperous, and free from the bondage of Karma, though engaged in the performance of worldly duties. Sins do not taint those who regularly study the Gita, just as water does not stain a lotus leaf. The Gita is the best abode of Lord Krishna. The spiritual potency of the Lord abides in every verse of the Gita. The Bhagavad-Gita is the storehouse of spiritual knowledge. The Lord Himself spoke this supreme science of the Absolute containing the essence of all the scriptures for the benefit of humanity. All the Upanishads are the cows; Arjuna is the calf; Krishna is the milker; the nectar of the Gita is the milk; and persons of purified intellects are the drinkers. One need not study any other scripture if one seriously studies the Gita, contemplates the meaning of the verses, and practices its teachings in one's daily life.

The affairs of the world are run by the first commandment of the Creator — the teachings of selfless service — so beautifully expounded in the Gita. The sacred knowledge of doing one's duty without looking for a reward is the original teaching that alone can lead to salvation. The Gita is like a ship by which one can easily cross the ocean of transmigration and attain liberation. It is said that wherever the Gita is chanted or read with love and devotion, Lord makes Himself present there to listen and enjoy the company of His devotees. Going to a place where Gita is regularly chanted or taught is like going to a holy place of pilgrimage. One who regularly reads, recites to others, hears, and follows the sacred knowledge contained in the Gita is sure to attain liberation from the bondage of Karma and attain Nirvana.

Though engaged in the performance of worldly duties, one who is regular in the study of the Gita becomes happy and free from Karmic bondage. All the sacred centers of pilgrimage, gods, sages, and great souls dwell in the place where the Gita is kept and read. Help during troubles comes quickly where the Gita is recited, and the Lord dwells where it is read, heard, taught, and contemplated. By repeated reading of the Gita, one attains bliss and liberation. One who contemplates the teachings of the Gita at the time of death becomes free from sin and attains salvation. Lord Krishna personally comes to take such a person to His Supreme Abode — the highest transcendental plane of existence.

The grace of the Gita cannot be described. Its teachings are simple as well as abstruse and profound. New and deeper meanings are revealed to a serious student of the Gita, and the teachings remain ever inspirational. The interest in a serious study of the Gita is not available to all but only to those with good Karma. One should be very earnest in the study of the Gita.

The Gita is the heart, the soul, the breath, and the voice of the Lord. No austerity, penance, sacrifice, charity, pilgrimage, vow, fasting, or continence equals the study of the Gita. It is difficult for any ordinary person, or even for the great sages and scholars, to understand the deep, secret meaning of the Gita. To understand the Gita completely is like a fish trying to fathom the extent of the ocean, or a bird trying to measure the sky. The Gita is the deep ocean of the knowledge of the Absolute; only the Lord has a complete understanding of it. Nobody, other than Lord Krishna, should claim authority on the Gita.

O Arjuna, did you listen to this with single-minded attention? Has your delusion born of ignorance been completely destroyed? (18.72)

Arjuna said: By Your grace my delusion is destroyed; I have gained Self-knowledge; my confusion with regard to body and Spirit is dispelled; and I shall obey Your command. (18.73)

When one realizes Him by His grace, the knots of ignorance are loosened, all doubts and confusions are dispelled, and all Karma is exhausted (MuU 2.02.08). The true knowledge of the Supreme Being comes only by His grace.

Sanjaya said: Thus, I heard this wonderful dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, causing my hair to stand on end. (18.74)

By the grace of sage Vyasa, I heard this most secret and supreme yoga directly from Krishna, the Lord of yoga, Himself speaking to Arjuna

before my very eyes of clairvoyance granted by sage Vyasa. (18.75)

O King, by repeated remembrance of this marvelous and sacred dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, I am thrilled at every moment. (18.76)

Recollecting again and again, O King, that marvelous form of Krishna, I am greatly amazed, and I rejoice over and over again. (18.77)

BOTH TRANSCENDENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION ARE NEEDED FOR A BALANCED LIVING

Wherever there will be both Krishna, the Lord of yoga (or Dharma in the form of the scriptures), and Arjuna with the weapons of duty and protection, there will be everlasting prosperity, victory, happiness, and morality. This is my conviction. (18.78)

Where there is Dharma (righteous duty), there is the grace of Lord Krishna; where there is the grace of Lord Krishna, there will be peace and victory (MB 6.43.60). Everlasting peace and prosperity in the family are possible only by performing one's duty with full metaphysical knowledge of the Absolute. Peace and prosperity of a nation depend on mastering both the knowledge of scriptures and the knowledge of the use of weapons of protection, as well as science and technology. It is said that science and technology without spirituality are blind, and spirituality without technology is lame.

This book is offered to Lord Shri Krishna. May
He bless us all with Goodness,
Prosperity, and Peace.

EPILOGUE

The Farewell Message of Lord Krishna

Lord Krishna on the eve of His departure from the arena of this world, after finishing the difficult task of establishing righteousness (Dharma), gave His last parting discourse to His cousin brother Uddhava, who was also His dearest devotee and follower. At the end of a long sermon comprising more than one thousand verses Uddhava said: O Lord, I think the pursuit of yoga as You narrated to Arjuna, and now to me, is very difficult, indeed, for most people because it entails control of the unruly senses. Please tell me a short, simple, and easy way to God-realization. Lord Krishna, upon Uddhava's

request, gave the essentials of Self-realization (BP 11.06-29) for the modern age as follows:

(1) Do your duty, to the best of your abilities, for Me without any selfish motive, and remember Me at all times — before starting a work, at the completion of a task, and while inactive. (2) Practice to look upon all creatures as Myself in thought, word, and deed; and mentally bow down to them. (3) Awaken your dormant Kundalini power and perceive — through the activities of mind, senses, breathing, and emotions — that the power of God is within you at all times, and is constantly doing all the work, using you as a mere instrument.

Yogi Mumtaz Ali says: One who fully knows oneself as a mere instrument and a playground of mother Nature, knows the Truth. Cessation of all desires by realizing the true essence of the world and the human mind is Self-realization. Hariharananda Giri says: God is in everything as well as above everything. So if you want to realize Him, you must seek and see Him in every atom, in every matter, in every bodily function, and in every human being, with an attitude of surrender.

Muniji says: You must be God's gardener, carefully tending the garden, but never becoming attached to what will blossom, what will flower, what will give fruit or what will wither and die. Expectation is the mother of frustration, and acceptance gives peace.

Lord Krishna also summarized the essence of God-realization (BP 2.09.32-35) as follows:

The Supreme Lord Krishna said: One who wants to know Me, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, should only understand that I existed before creation; I exist in the creation, as well as after complete dissolution. Any other existence is nothing but My illusory energy (Maya). I exist within the creation and at the same time outside the creation. I am the all-pervading Supreme Lord who exists everywhere, in everything, and at all times.

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